

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION:

AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Edited by Brendan Carmody

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RELIGIOUS CONVERSION:
AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Conversion, moving from one worldview to another, has formed an important dimension of African history. For the most part it has consisted in a movement from a traditional African worldview to some form of Christianity or Islam though this may be less true in more recent times. The contributions to this volume are focused on this aspect of personal and social religious change.

Conversion to Christianity or Islam in Africa has constituted part of the Christian and Muslim missionary expansion since their beginnings. The early Christian period includes such people as Anthony the Copt and St. Augustine of Hippo. Islamic conversion similarly includes such notables as Mansa Musa and Ibn Battuta. Over the centuries the conversion rates to Islam and Christianity varied with the shifting socio-political landscape. For instance the spread of Christianity southwards was halted by the difficulties of traversing the Sahara as well as because of the Muslim North African presence. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, the continent's population was 32 per cent Muslim and 11 per cent Christian (Barrett et al 2001, 13).

It was not until European reconnection with sub-Saharan Africa in the fifteenth century that conversion became part of the Portuguese explorations. Though, at this time, Christian missionaries were initially well received which resulted in significant numbers of converts to Christianity, this was not sustained. The decline may be partly explained by the fact that the Christian message embedded in western culture assumed a superior and normative approach to traditional African religion and ways of life (Lonergan 1967; Hillman 1989, 1; Berman 1975,5). Such a standpoint made it difficult to generate any significant dialogue. Moreover, the Christian message was all too often interwoven with imperialistic ideology. This became increasingly true as the Atlantic slave trade expanded between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Somewhat ironically, perhaps because of this close alliance of the Christian and Muslim missionary with imperialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the conversion rate increased dramatically. Today Africa is reckoned to be 45 per cent Christian and 40 per cent Muslim (Barrett et al 2001, 13). For this dramatic change in the rate of conversion, there have been various explanations of which Robin Horton's generated much interest (Horton 1971). Horton's approach represented a new era in the study of mission history in so far as it views conversion from the perspective of converts, leaving behind what Strayer (1976) termed the metropolitan-ecclesiastical and even nationalist moments.

For Horton, African conversion was a consequence of major social change where the worldviews of people were expanded. In order to provide adequate ultimate explanations of life, people had to shift their traditional lenses. This did not necessarily imply major change of worldview but it did mean a new perspective which, if Christianity or Islam were available, might easily provide aspects of this. In this way, conversion to Christianity or Islam largely modified or cognitively reorganized the traditional worldview (Young 2012, 118).

Not surprisingly, Horton's thesis had critics including Humphrey Fisher (1973, 1985). While Fisher agreed with Horton that the traditional worldview was fundamental to any change of viewpoint, he nonetheless argued that Christian and Muslim conversion, if taken in its fuller sense, was more than a new shape of the tradition. It entailed a radical reformulation of it. In his analysis, Fisher clarified the conceptualization of conversion whereby he identified its various stages which he termed quarantine, mixing and reform. From this perspective, Fisher indicated that Horton was speaking of conversion as adhesion or mixing, not deliberate turning or reform which is the proper sense of conversion in Fisher's view. Thus, calling oneself Muslim or Christian may not mean any major change.

Identifying oneself as a Christian or Muslim in association with the respective traditions normally entailed deep-rooted commitment which resulted in renunciation of something precious in oneself or one's culture. At the same time, aspects of tradition could sometimes be employed in elaborating the message of Christianity or Islam. Accommodation was made between the traditional view of God and what Christianity or Islam brought, as Colson's reflections indicate largely underwriting the Horton thesis. There were however numerous instances where becoming a Christian entailed breaking with tradition especially but not exclusively in the case of polygamy. Most Christian churches demanded this – much to the dismay of mostly male converts. Similarly, a time came when old ways had to be superseded in Islam as evidenced by numerous jihads noted by Phiri.

The Horton-Fisher debate provides a lens through which the complex conversion process can be analyzed. Undoubtedly, conversion oftentimes entailed little major change as Horton indicates, and so what emerged was tradition in new dress. However, as Fisher and other authors argue, this was not the whole story. With ever increasing involvement in the world of modernity and capitalist expansion, a new worldview was emerging as Van Binsbergen

(1981) and Shillington note (2012, 373-378). A significant road to that world was the school and the literacy skills it provided (Berman 1975, 41-43). Often, the new religion appeared to work hand in hand with the new socio-economic environment so that becoming a Christian or Muslim in school could provide the young person with what he/she needed as Carmody (1988) indicates. What often results from this is the formation of a person with two separate world views side-by-side—that of tradition and that of modernity.

In focusing thus, conversion discourse has moved in two opposing directions. On the one hand, there is much reflection on what has been termed inculturation after a period of wholesale neglect. At the same time, there also has been an emphasis on socio-cultural development (Ela 1981; Carmody 2013, 253-254). In both cases, there is a danger that never the twain do meet. Conversion as reform resulting from critical self-assessment does not take place. Commonly this seems to characterize Christian and Muslim converts today where they go to church/mosque in the morning and to the diviner in the afternoon. There continues to be a challenge to integrate what appears to be two radically different worldviews which may be poorly met especially if religious education programs become ever more part of the modernizing system.

It is hoped that the contributions offered here which focus mainly on Zambia will provide resources for further discussion of conversion. Even in narrowing the area of study, there is need for caution when generalizing. This set of essays is aimed at empowering students at third level institutions to become more religiously literate when treating this significant topic of conversion.

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MISSION HISTORY IN AFRICA: New Perspectives on an Encounter

By Robert Strayer

In recent years, the study of mission history has achieved a remarkable vitality, partly owing to the ready availability of material but deriving more fundamentally from a growing integration with the major thrusts of contemporary African historiography. It would seem appropriate at this point to attempt a “progress report” on these accomplishments and to suggest some possible directions for further investigation.

From its inception, mission history has paralleled rather closely the larger tendencies of African history generally. Formal examination of the subject was initiated by missionaries and their supporters and gave rise to what might be called the metropolitan-ecclesiastical school of mission history. Focused on European strategies for the planting of Christianity in Africa and on the heroic missionary efforts to implement these plans, this literature hardly spoke to the theme of encounter at all. In this respect, it resembled the early colonial history which saw Africa as a stage on which Europeans of all kinds played out their interests and their fantasies.

Taking vigorous exception to this view of the African past was what might loosely be called the nationalist perspective in African historiography which emerged strongly in the 1950s and the 1960s. In consonance with this new emphasis on African initiative, historians of mission activity began to probe the ways in which African perceptions and reactions conditioned the pattern of mission expansion, the extent to which evangelisation was an accomplishment of African catechists rather than European missionaries, and the kinds of protests that were generated against mission policy and attitudes. Concerned to puncture the pious pretensions of the earlier approach, nationalist historians delighted in showing that missionaries were no less racist than other Europeans and that they were intimately linked to imperial pressures and colonial governments. Finally, the nationalist perspective has emphasised the extent to which mission activity has transformed traditional patterns of African life by undermining the cultural self-confidence of their converts and by generating an educated and modernising elite which eventually brought down the colonial system that had spawned them (Ajayi, 1965; Ayandele, 1966; Temu, 1972; Ekechi, 1972).

The nationalist stance towards the missionary presence was profoundly ambivalent. While they were bitterly critical of missionary arrogance and deeply regretted aspects of the world they had lost partly through mission efforts, they regarded mission-inspired efforts at modernisation as fundamentally progressive and believed that missions had contributed, albeit unwittingly, to political independence, the great denouement of nationalist historiography. Clearly this point of view was a useful stage in the development of mission history, for it exposed mission hypocrisy, uncovered an important arena of African protest, countered the colonial stereotype of African inactivity, and established the importance of African initiatives in the making of mission communities and churches. Yet it is time now to go beyond the dominantly political emphasis of the nationalist approach and to refine our analysis of the relationship of missions to colonial politics and social change. These have been among the major themes of recent work in mission history.

Without doubt the most exciting of these new approaches has been that of African religious history, and here again, developments in the larger field have stimulated new modes of inquiry into mission history. It is only very recently that historians have acted on the assumption that African religious systems may in fact have changed significantly over time and that this history could be recovered (Ranger and Kimambo, 1972). Associated with this discovery of indigenous religious history was the idea of examining mission-African interaction at the level of symbol, ritual, myth, and theology in brief, at the level of religious encounter. In emphasising the political, economic, and social factors in the spread of Christianity, nationalist historians largely neglected the religious dimension, in part at least in a deliberate effort to reaffirm the validity of traditional religious systems against European presumptions of the superiority of their own faith. Acknowledging African interest in Christianity qua religion meant accepting missionary definitions of traditional belief systems as inadequate or worse; thus it was assumed that religious exchange was unlikely to occur without being stimulated by some ulterior motive. For example, in a recent study Professor Ekechi wrote that "Igbos did not accept Christianity because they thought it was superior to their own religion" (Ekechi, 1972; 22; also see Southall, 1961: 3; Cairns, 1965: 10-11). While by no means wholly inaccurate, such views may underestimate the capacity of African societies for serious religious interaction with Christianity and the extent to which social and religious change may subtly intermingle and facilitate one another.

It is in fact precisely the assertion of the new mission history that African societies did on occasion see in mission Christianity symbols, techniques, and ideas which they found to be appropriate or useful in campaign with the new and wider world that was intruding upon them, an encounter that occurred at several levels of African religious systems. One such point of contact, most clearly articulated by Robin Horton (1971), existed at the top of the African religious hierarchy in the Christian concept of an active and personally concerned High God. Local spirits and subordinate deities, Horton argues, were becoming increasingly inadequate to explain, predict, and control a larger social universe, the defining features of which were so clearly and painfully alien, and in such an environment Christian monotheism might very well seem both intellectually and religiously attractive. In his study of Kalahari religious history over the past century, Horton (1970) has provided some documentation for his theory. He observed that the cult of the supreme being became “more important than ever” and made an easy identification with the Christian God, while lesser spirit cults declined or fluctuated. Moreover, Christian modes of approach to God, namely churchgoing, have largely replaced traditional means of intercession without implying acceptance of other Christian ideas such as sin, salvation, and the afterlife.

Yet the advent of the macrocosm did not everywhere or automatically erode that intermediate level of the African religious hierarchy between man and God. Here too there was the possibility of interaction, particularly where religious expression was institutionalised and focused in a territorial cult rather than dispersed in private worship, as occurred in segmentary lineage societies. The M’Bona cult among the Mang’anja people of southern Malawi, recently described by Matthew Scholffeleers (1975), represents a case in point. The central figure in the M’Bona cult was the spirit of a great Mang’anja prophet, martyred by an alien political authority, whose death “had liberated great spiritual power.” When not directly associated with hostile political forces, mission Christianity offered little direct competition for the M’Bona cult and much room for symbolic and mythological borrowing. The absence of a named father in the M’Bona tradition, because of the Mang’anja system of matrilineal descent, came to be interpreted as an indication of the prophet’s virgin birth, while his ability to ensure an adequate food supply was represented as providing biblical manna. M’Bona, in fact, became a black Christ, responsible for African welfare in much the same way as Jesus, God’s other son, cared for whites, and neither was to interfere in

the affairs of the other. By assimilating biblical imagery, the M'Bona cult both linked itself to the religious tradition of the dominant Europeans and acquired a new mode of expressing anti-colonial sentiments.

Likewise at the microcosmic level of local belief and technique, there were, at least in African eyes, frequent points of contact with mission Christianity. Tapping the power of alien intruders was often believed to involve giving up or destroying old paraphernalia and charms, which were sometimes turned over to baffled but pleased missionaries. More positively, many Africans felt that mere possession of the Bible or acquisition of the skills of literacy was effective in warding off misfortune or promoting temporal success. In the 1890s, for example, there was a significant movement into the Anglican mission in Kenya by those Giriama who had migrated just north of the Sabaki River. The resident missionary described the process as follows: "All their fetish worship has stopped. We were commissioned to destroy every sign of it ... The people have stopped wearing charms. All of the men and some women attend morning and evening worship - many learning to read" (CMS/189/45, Hooper to Baylis, Dec. 19, 1896).

Certainly the most pressing microcosmic religious problem in many areas was that of witchcraft. Jocelyn Murray (n.d.) has suggested that the missionary message of sin often must have sounded like a description of the effects of witchcraft, and the invitation to salvation like an alternative to the cleansing rituals designed to rid the community of that blight. Indeed, in my own research, I have observed a temporarily heightened receptivity to mission teaching among the Taveta people of south-eastern Kenya after the application of protective medicine and an anti-witchcraft cleansing ceremony had failed to remedy a series of natural disasters including sicknesses, famine, and locusts. Or again, on the lower Congo in 1886, Swedish missionaries found themselves receiving and destroying the nkissi or charms of many people and soon had on their hands a congregation of one thousand people at Mbanza Mateka, while others in neighbouring communities were burning their charms in the process of accepting a new indigenous anti-witchcraft cult (Axelson, 1970: 271, 281; Vansina, 1973: 85-86). In examining the early twentieth century religious history of the Lala of Zambia, T.O. Ranger (1975) has shown that they desperately "wanted a Christianity which offered a spiritual solution to the problem of witchcraft", and not finding it in the local UMCA mission, turned to the millenarian message of Watch Tower preacher Tomo Nyirenda, whose activities ultimately issued in the witch-killing movement of the Mwana Lesa.

All of this suggests that the expansion of Christianity in modern Africa had important popular religious roots, as it apparently had in the late classical world of the third century. Peter Brown's (1971: 55) observation that the missionaries of the early church "advanced principally by revealing the bankruptcy of men's invisible enemies" may apply as well to their twentieth century counterparts in Africa. The latter, however, seldom tried to make religious contact in anything approaching African categories of thought, with the result that the initiative for religious interaction derived primarily from the flexible, non-dogmatic, almost experimental character of traditional African religious systems (Isichei, 1969 and 1970). Though it was in this respect a one-way transaction, the mission-African encounter can be viewed as only the most recent phase in a much longer story of African religious development and change. Thus mission studies can tie into a central current concern of African history as well as participating in the history of the expansion of Christianity.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that mission Christianity was the sole source of new concepts, symbols, and myths to accompany and facilitate the transition to the new social universe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for African religions themselves were not without internal resources for the task. Horton (1971) has theorised that concepts of an active High God were in fact gaining ground within traditional cosmologies when Christianity appeared coincidentally on the scene, and then acceptance of the new religions was due as much to developments within the old as to the exertions of missionaries. There seems to be some evidence of this view. Apart from Horton's own study on the Kalahari, Pauw's (1960: 212-15) work on Tswana religion comes to the conclusion that while ancestor cults declined, "the belief in God is much more prominent, more clearly expressed and more consciously held than appears to have been the case in former times".

Indigenous witchcraft-eradication movements, the phenomenon of African prophetism, and the revival of traditional religions in Buganda and in contemporary Rhodesia represent further evidence for the vitality of traditional African religions. In West Africa, Ajayi and Ayandele (1974: 1) have commented on the continuing strength of traditional religion:

In spite of the iconoclastic efforts of Muslims and Christians, shrines, groves and "idols" are as plentiful as ever ... The incredibly resilient African religion is still patronized by whole ethnic groups ... as well as

several towns and village communities and is far from being ignored by individual Muslims and Christians.

There can be no linear description of modern African religious history which points to the steady erosion of traditional systems in favour of Christianity. An uneven interaction between the two, coupled with a recognition of the capacity for persistence, renewal, and change within traditional belief systems offers a less elegant but more interesting context for future research in mission history.

An awareness of the vitality of indigenous religion leads to a consideration of the sources of religious opposition to the missionary presence. If missionaries were potential sources of religious power, that power could be abused. If missionaries brought rain, they might also withhold it. The coincidence of famine and drought among the Taita of Kenya with the arrival of the first resident missionary in 1883 provoked considerable antagonism toward him on the grounds that he was preventing much-needed rainfall. This hostility delayed missionary occupation of the area for over a decade. But as colonial rule became entrenched, this element of fear diminished, as did the problem of religious competition, for missionaries largely removed themselves from such major areas of African religious concern as supernatural healing, witchcraft, and spirit possession.

Anti-mission protest became part of the larger African response to the colonial situation. Among the Chewa of Malawi for example, a major agency of continuing resistance to colonial rule were masked dancing societies called Nyau, which sought to defend both Chewa cultural identity and local village autonomy against European rule (as they had earlier done against the Ngoni). They created masks and songs designed to ridicule such major Christian figures as Mary and Joseph and campaigned to enrol school age children in Nyau societies before they could be recruited into mission schools. Nyau societies, concluded Ian Linden (1974), remained for decades a major obstacle to the growth of Christianity in Malawi.

African reactions to mission Christianity cannot, however, be divided into two neat and opposite categories marked attraction and opposition. The history of religious encounter must also include the theme of disappointment, early expectations subsequently unfulfilled. In his study of popular intellectual responses to the pressures of acculturation among the Fang of Gabon, James Fernandez (1972: 25-26) remarked on this phenomenon:

Since the Fang had early regarded the coming of the missionary with high hopes, one can imagine their sense of deception when not only were

the expectations of material advantages disappointed but there occurred a great increase in evil (witchcraft). Whereas earlier there had been a tendency to assimilate the Europeans, with their manifest material superiority, to the ancestors or to some other kind of supernatural status, there now appeared a tendency to assimilate them to the power of evil, and in various myths, to ascribe their superiority to trickery and duplicity.

The theme of disappointment touches on mission history most concretely when it confronts the question of religious independence. In fact, one of the reasons for the continued vitality of mission studies lies in its attempt to locate the roots of the massive proliferation of independent churches, surely one of the most dramatic developments in the history of twentieth century Christianity. Much of the voluminous literature on the subject has emphasised the element of political or social protest, and thus the search for origins has focused on missionary attitudes and policies on matters of race, education, and Africanisation of the church hierarchy.

This was an emphasis particularly compatible with the outlook of nationalist historiography. A few of the older studies as well as many of the more recent ones have tended to shift the emphasis to an examination of the process of religious disappointment. Horton's (1971) suggestive thesis on the inability of mission Christianity to meet the African need for an instrumental religion of explanation, prediction, and control has been the most general formulation of this approach. Robert Mitchell's (1970) examination of the origins of the Aladura movements of western Nigeria found the roots of schism in the inability of mission churches to provide an adequate religious response to the practical problems of life-healing, unemployment, sterility, and in the incompatibility of Christian notions of evil as the breach of an abstract moral principle with traditional views of evil as real and personal power. Central African studies (Murray, n.d.) in particular have stressed the inadequacy of mission response to the problems of witchcraft in explaining the popularity of Zionist independent churches.

While mission history links up with the burgeoning study of independent churches, its focus is mission communities and the churches they have spawned. In fact, so much attention has been paid to separatist movements that the question confronting mission studies now is how to explain the historical vitality of orthodox mission communities despite internal conflicts of a political or religious nature and competition from independent churches. The Africanisation

of Christianity must have been occurring, at least to some extent, in these communities as well as in their independent counterparts. Was adaptation, in short, the price of survival?

The theme of adaptation within mission communities can be approached from at least three angles. In the first place, it might be argued that adaptation was not always necessary in order to make Christianity more genuinely African. Such an argument would involve challenging the sharp distinction which some have made between African religions as “this-worldly” instruments of explanation, prediction, and control and mission Christianity as a religion of personal communion, an incompatibility often regarded as central to separatism (Horton, 1971). However, the phenomenal success of mission Christianity in Africa, as compared to India and China, for instance, might lead one to look for elements of continuing convergence rather than differences between the two religions.

Certainly mission Christianity was not always wholly unconcerned with real “this-worldly” problems. Particularly in the pioneer period, missionaries often presented their message in straightforward instrumental terms, particularly in those areas of life over which they felt little control. They prayed for rain, sometimes in virtual competition with traditional rainmakers; they sometimes presented reading as a magic art; they assured inquirers that Europe’s power derived from worship of the one true God. For a later period, one might point to Horton’s prediction that the long-term prospects for religion in Africa, as in any modernising society, lie in the performance of expressive rather than instrumental functions. If so, then those individuals who had come to a genuinely secular and scientific view of the world might find a more intellectually satisfying religious experience in modern mission Christianity, with its emphasis on the satisfaction of non-empirical needs, than in independent churches, which, unless they transform themselves, may prove to be the last spurt of religious instrumentalism in an increasingly secularised Africa.

A second, and rather less speculative, approach to the question of adaptation lies in a re-examination of the extent to which missionaries themselves encouraged or allowed adaptation in African religious and cultural forms. There seems to be some correlation between missionary adaptation and resistance to the attractions of independent churches. In his study of southern Shona independent churches in Rhodesia, M.L. Daneel (1971: 244-65) carefully compared the attitudes and policies of the Roman Catholic missions and the Dutch Reformed Church

mission in an effort to explain why the former lost far fewer members to the independents than the latter. He concluded that the willingness of the Catholics to Christianise elements of Shona ritual and to be flexible on such matters as polygamy, bride-wealth, and veneration of ancestors was “the most important reason” for this discrepancy. Research on the female circumcision crisis among the Kikuyu of Kenya suggests that Anglican unwillingness to push the initiation issue beyond a certain point resulted in far fewer defections from the stations of the Church Missionary Society than from those of its Presbyterian and American Fundamentalist rivals. And it has been suggested that one reason for the relative absence of separatist movements in Tanganyika lay in the presence of a missionary leadership strongly committed to adaptation (Ranger, 1971: 131).

A third approach to adaptation focuses on the African Christians. Adaptation was not usually planned from above, and even where it was, it could only be implemented with the cooperation of those below. It takes nothing away from Bishop Lucas’s creative efforts to Christianise the male initiation rites around Massai in southern Tanganyika to recognise that his success was very dependent on the active support of African priests, who gained prestige from their control of the new rites, and of African congregations, who accepted them as valid indicators of adult status (Ranger, 1972). More important by far were those frequently unplanned and perhaps unconscious adjustments of concept and practice made by African Christians within the framework of mission communities and without the inspiration or approval of their European mentors.

One such pattern of adjustment was simple eclecticism, a carry-over perhaps from a traditional attitude of religious pragmatism. African clergymen who wore protective charms and communicants who consulted customary religious specialists put this pragmatism into practice and frequently subjected themselves to severe church discipline for doing so. In the eyes of many African Christians, however, it was missionary absolutism, not Christianity, that created the problem. And with the proliferation of mission outstations after World War I and the withdrawal of many missionaries into the central institutions of the church, this pattern of adjustment doubtless became easier. Marshall Murphree (1969) has described a situation of “religious interdependence” among the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Independent, and traditional religious communities in Shonaland in which individuals shuttle with relative ease among these various systems of belief and ritual. Evidence from Ghana, South Africa, and elsewhere

(Brokensha - 1966; Pauw, 1960; Tanner, 1967) suggests that orthodox Christian communities were by no means as alienated from or hostile to their societies as might be expected. All of this represented a quiet but effective movement away from the general mission view of Christianity as a religion of exclusive validity.

The reinterpretation of Christian rites and practices in terms of traditional belief represents another mode of adaptation that was altogether possible within mission churches. African Dominican sisters in Rhodesia, we are told, regard themselves as equivalent to the traditional *mbonga*, virgins who served at the shrine of Mwari, the Shona High God (Weinrich, 1975: 227). Professor Ranger (1972: 231-33) has shown how baptism could become a healing rite, St Andrew a rain-giver, and how African clergy might on occasion be assimilated into the role of customary religious practitioners. It has in fact been argued that mission Christianity on occasion adapted itself all too successfully to traditional modes of religious thought. In examining Protestantism in Uganda, Philip Turner (1971) claims to have found “a form of Christianity which fused easily with many aspects of traditional culture” in that it is ecclesiastically conservative, legalistic, or proverbial in its use of the Bible and pragmatic in the sense of being essentially unconcerned with theological issues.

But beyond ritual mobility and reinterpretation, there is some evidence that adaptation may take the form of outright incorporation of traditional practices. The Rukwadzano and Mabvuwi, Rhodesian Methodist associations of women and men respectively, regularly experience miraculous healings and practice exorcism during their meetings (Murphree, 1969: 73-77; Muzorewa, 1975: 258). That such phenomena normally occur in the absence of missionaries, and African pastors suggest that this is a popular adaptation from below and that participants justify their behaviour by reference to New Testament parallels indicates that they feel it is unnecessary to venture beyond the framework of mission Christianity to meet these needs.

Clearly, then, a considerable range of religious adaptation was possible within mission churches without provoking schism. We have perhaps underestimated the extent to which some Africans in some churches could find a real measure of religious fulfilment, even if they had to create it themselves. It seems that this was most likely to occur in churches at opposite ends of the theological spectrum; Catholic and High Anglican communities on the one side and Pentecostal churches (which emphasise the work of the Holy Spirit) on the other.

The possibility of adaptation is not, however, the only reason for the persistence of mission communities, for they came to perform a variety of important functions in the larger society. It has been argued, for example, that among the Igbo, Christianity, particularly in its patriarchal Roman Catholic variant, served to reinforce the values of male dominance which new and independent economic opportunities for women tended to undermine (Salamone, 1975). Others have suggested that Christianity came to express the collective aspiration of certain peoples, at least as articulated by their elites. Margaret Read (1971: 353) has remarked that a number of Christian Ngoni began to articulate the traditional concept of a Ngoni mission or task in terms of the Christian missionary purpose. In Buganda (Low, 1968: 150-63), Christianity as well as Islam symbolised for many that greater destiny toward which their country had been striving for centuries, while conversion to Catholicism among the Padhola served to strengthen their identity against that of their Baganda and largely Protestant conquerors (Ogot, 1972: 131-32).

In a more general sense, mission communities continued to be viewed as highly important mediators of modernity. A recent study (Salamone, 1975) has suggested that many Igbo Christians of an orthodox persuasion regard independent churches as backward looking and full of “ignorant dirty people”, while mission Christianity is seen as both progressive and consonant with traditional values. Likewise, educated Kikuyu Christians clearly saw themselves in the vanguard of progressive social change and yet not divorced from the past. “The Gospel”, declared a group of staunch mission adherents in 1929, “began to form a new nation from that of old Kikuyu ... We are at the beginning of a great building up of new customs and the forming of Christianity, the same as those who before us made ordinances for the generations after them” (Anderson, n.d.). Such perceptions often had an important basis in fact, for mission schools in many places retained a virtual monopoly of quality education throughout the colonial era. Mission communities, in short, could more adequately perform the function, vital in a colonial society, of linking the culture of subordinate communities to that of their rulers (Ranger, 1975: 67).

If the new mission history goes beyond the nationalist perspective in examining the process of religious encounter, it seeks to refine the nationalist analysis of the relationship of mission to the politics of colonial society. Despite the monopoly of legitimate political authority in white hands, colonial societies

were intensely political rather than merely administrative societies. Within the community of the colonisers and that of the colonised, as well as between them, there occurred a great deal of bargaining, compromise, and shifting of alliances. The missionary role in this political maelstrom, which after all largely determined the shape of colonial societies, needs to be re-examined.

In studying the politics on the European side of the racial cleavage, nationalist historians have stressed in general the extent of integration between colonial and mission structures. Such an emphasis can hardly be criticised, for evidence is overwhelming that missionaries willingly served colonial regimes as channels of communication, agencies for the recruitment and training of lower level administrative staff, inculcators of appropriate political values, and in numerous other ways. Yet to characterise missions as nothing more than an “arm of the colonial administrations” (Temu, 1972: 132) is surely to neglect important nuances and major elements of divergence in the relationship. While there was seldom conflict over such fundamental values as the survival of the colonial system, there was nonetheless a consciousness of separate interests, antagonism, and sometimes struggle between missionaries and those other whites in the colonial establishment, a pattern of conflict that could on occasion have important consequences for both mission communities and the larger colonial society.

While the grounds of divergence were many and varied, they were all rooted in a general sense that an overly close association with the state might imperil the missions’ ability to realise their own goals. The head of the Anglican mission in the early years of British involvement in Kenya was concerned to “avoid any action or cooperation (with the Imperial British East African Company) such as would give the idea that the BEAC and CMS are only different names for the same thing” (CMS 1880/360, Price to Smith, September 15, 1888). Catholics in Rhodesia were likewise warned to “remember that you are not to propagate the kingdom of men” (Daneel, 1971: 234). German mission societies in particular appear to have had a more suspicious attitude toward the German colonial movement than did the British missions for their own imperial tradition (Wright, 1971: 1-20; Hallden, 1968).

The cleavage between the missions and other Europeans was rooted in differences in class, education, and values, particularly where the more evangelical mission societies predominated. A critical observer of public affairs in Kenya commented perceptively on the matter in the mid-1920s:

It is important to realize that the Evangelical party, as the inheritors of the Puritan tradition are now called, have always been a minority party in the national life ...

The puritan tradition is, furthermore, notoriously unpopular among those classes of English people from which the Europeans in Kenya are chiefly drawn.

It stigmatizes many of their pleasures, such as horse racing and the use of alcohol. The emphasis it lays on private judgment is difficult to reconcile with authority and it is well known to be the parent of equalitarian and socialist ideas that are even more excessively disliked by Europeans abroad than by their friends in England. It may be added that most missionaries are adherents of the older theological ideas, now becoming less common in Europe (Leys, 1973: 226-27).

Here is an area in which the need for research into missionary sociology is obvious in order to define the sort of social backgrounds that gave rise to particular missionary attitudes to the colonial situation (Beidelman, 1974: 238-39). An example of what such studies might demonstrate is shown in recent work on Rev. A.S. Cripps of Rhodesia, whose Anglo-Catholic background, Oxford education, and clerical experience in a London slum combined to produce an attitude of Christian socialism and an uncompromising antagonism toward many aspects of the Rhodesian regime (Steele, 1975).

Where the missionary presence had predated that of colonial authority, missionary resentment over increasingly strong government control of their competitive and expansionary efforts was prevalent. When the government of Kenya required rival missions to keep their stations at least ten miles apart, it was regarded by at least one outraged Anglican as "a monstrous violation of British liberties" (CM/1910/71, Wray to Baylis, April 2, 1910). But there were other and more potent reasons for missionary uneasiness with the advent of colonial authority. While most missionaries were convinced imperialists, they held to a view of empire opposed to official imperialism in several important respects.

One of those differences involved the potential secularism of government policy, a fear missionaries experienced most directly when cooperating with state authorities on educational matters. It is ironic that while education was the area in which mission and colonial structures were closely integrated, it was also here that government policy made missionaries most anxious and defensive. Several recent works on the making of British educational policy in Kenya (Schilling, 1972; King, 1971; Anderson, 1970) show clearly how the policy of mission-government

cooperation represented from the mission viewpoint a continual struggle to maintain essential interests. They fought a losing battle against a conscience clause that exempted unwilling students from religious instruction, and a more successful one to retain a measure of literary education in the curriculum against settler pressures for an almost wholly technical focus. What made missions nervous was the ever-present possibility that the government might opt for a policy of secular schools and thus deprive missions of their most effective recruiting device for the church. It was in fact a Belgian move toward the secularisation of the Congolese educational system in the mid-1950s that destroyed the mission-state entente which had for decades constituted one of the pillars of the colonial establishment (Markowitz, 1973: 83-103).

The most obvious and publicised of the conflicts between missions and colonial authorities occurred when missionaries acted in their presumed role of defender of African interests. On one level, missionaries acted on behalf of their converts and attempted to pressure frequently reluctant governments into creating and enforcing the legal structures that would exempt Christians from compromising participation in “pagan” culture. Leon Spencer (1973), for example, has described a twelve-year struggle by Kenyan missionaries to secure passage of legislation protecting Christian widows from levirate marriages. On other occasions, however, they presumed to act on behalf of Africans generally with German missions taking up the challenge earliest. Marcia Wright has described mission-government relations in early Tanganyika as nothing less than a *kulturkampf*, primarily over German reliance on alien askaris for their lower level administrative staff (1971: 43-84). On the other side of the continent the Basel Mission was simultaneously publicising the abuses of the German plantation policy in the Cameroons and helping to oust an offending governor (Hallden, 1968). Similarly, Protestant missions in the Congo played an important role in exposing the terrible conditions created by Leopold’s early regime (Langergren, 1970: 344-46).

Further study is needed in order to define more precisely the conditions under which missions most actively opposed government policies which they regarded as inimical to African interests. Beidelman, for example, has suggested that mission - government antagonism was more likely where the two groups of Europeans differed in nationality (1974: 238). One might also hypothesise that occasion for protest was more frequent in settler territories than in those with an African cash crop economy.

A major nationalist criticism of missions has been that they acted hand in glove with the administration to subvert African political movements, especially during the inter-war period. Evidence from Kenya suggests, ironically enough, that it was those missionaries most outspokenly critical of colonial policy who were most effective in diverting African protest into what they regarded as constructive channels. A case in point involves the activities of W.E. Owen, known to the settlers as “Archdemon Owen” and to his Provincial Commissioner as “an out and out Bolshevik”. Believing that the only “Christian justification for empire is service,” Owen roundly and frequently condemned what he saw as the “foreign exploitation of the soil” and publicly denounced government capitulations to settler pressure. It was largely the expression of such views that gave Owen the necessary standing in African eyes to convert the politically active Young Kavirondo Association into the moderate and welfare-oriented Kavirondo Taxpayers Welfare Association (Lonsdale, 1970: 589-638). It would be interesting to know if missionary opposition to government policies functioned elsewhere, as it apparently did in Kenya, to channel African protest in approved directions.

While very little study has been undertaken on mission interaction with the later mass nationalist movements of the post-1945 era, some preliminary work in Zaire and Rhodesia indicates that such movements provoked certain mission groups into a break with governments toward which they had long assumed an uncritical stance. Fearful of becoming altogether irrelevant in an environment of anti-European nationalism, progressive Catholic circles in the Congo began belatedly to Africanise the church hierarchy and to disengage it from close links with the state (Markowitz, 1973: 144-64). A similar set of political adjustments seem to be currently under way in Rhodesia, where even the Dutch Reformed Church has assumed a certain air of neutrality in the political conflicts of the day (Daneel, 1971: 243-44).

What I am suggesting here is that we need to become aware of the nuances involved in mission interactions with colonial politics and that we need to sort out, systematically and comparatively, those variables that have shaped the nature and impact of missionary attitudes and actions in the political arena.

A very similar plea might be made for the re-examination of the relationship between mission activity and cultural and social change. “Missionaries felt it right that the African must receive the Western culture with his Christianity”(Antieno-Odiambo, 1973: 5). Such has been the common understanding

of this relationship, for the often passionate denunciation of African culture by missionaries has been viewed as evidence of their insistence on wholesale Westernisation. Indeed both critics and defenders of the missionary enterprise have viewed it as a major and deliberate change agent in colonial society. African nationalists and their European supporters have damned missions for contributing to the disintegration of African culture, while secular champions of mission work have seen it as an important agency of social mobilisation and as a mechanism for easing the transition to the modern world (Temu, 1972: 155; Hopkins, 1966: 555-63).

It is possible, however, to raise questions on several levels about the equation of missions and change. In the first place, it may be necessary to re-examine the extent to which missionaries themselves generated major socio-cultural change. Horton has reduced the role of mission Christianity, even in the process of religious transformation, to that of a catalyst for other changes already in the air (1971). It is also essential to remember that the mission presence seldom made much headway until other political and economic changes had been imposed and thus can hardly be regarded as an independent motor of social change. While missions may, for example, have shaped the character of the new elite, they can hardly be credited with the unaided creation of this important social group. It would be interesting to know if the process of elite formation differed significantly in areas where government secular schools predominated from those in which missions provided most educational services. Recent studies from Malawi have suggested that certain missions, Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed Church for instance, simply did not generate anything akin to a modernising elite, and their authors have in fact sharply criticised African historians generally for an over-emphasis on the modernising outcomes of the colonial encounter (Linden, 1974; Channock, 1972: 429-36).

Furthermore, the character of the changes associated with the missionary intrusion did not always prove as politically and socially disruptive, nor as psychologically traumatic, as common images of the "lonely African" might indicate. Reviewing a number of southern African studies of acculturation, Murphree (1969: 160) noted that "in none of the societies studied have Christians become a distinct social group, separated from other members of their communities". More specifically, Schapera (1960) concluded that among the Tswana the introduction of mission Christianity, associated from the beginning

with its political leadership, produced no fundamental breach in Tswana political unity and did not lead to the “detribalisation” of mission adherents. In an example of Christianity among the Sukumu of Tanzania, Tanner (1967: 100) observed that “there are few convert tensions between Christians and traditionalists”. Is it possible that an understandable emphasis on conflict and discontinuity in recent African historiography has led scholars to neglect elements of persistence and of change that were neither dramatic nor disruptive? Missions studies in fact provide an arena in which to examine the subtle relationship of continuity and change in the cultural and social history of African societies.

Beyond re-evaluating the effectiveness of missionaries as agents of change, it is also necessary to reflect on the question of missionary intentions. To what extent did they, in fact, want to stimulate modernising or Westernising change? In an examination of Catholic missions in the Congo, Markowitz (1973: 13) has commented perceptively on the issue:

Their own anti-intellectualism and anti-cosmopolitanism also led many missionaries to become exponents and supporters of African provincialism. They idealized African village life and rejected such aspects of modernity as urbanization and industrialization. To them rural life was the epitome of virtue while the city was filled with evil and atheism. In its extreme form this rural romanticism led to rejection of the accoutrements of Western civilization and to cultural asceticism.

The existence of a deep missionary ambivalence regarding modern Western culture should not be surprising, for part of the missionary motivation was a desire to escape from the rationalism, materialism, and urbanisation that were eating away at the kind of society in which the church had earlier played a pivotal role. Furthermore, missionaries profoundly feared that contact with the West would “detribalise” their converts, a direction of cultural change which was viewed with as much horror as unredeemed African culture. Sometimes associated with this sentiment was a grudging respect for certain general values and structures of African life, if not their specific manifestations. African religiosity compared favourably to European secularism, though not in all its particulars. The “sense of filial piety” was approved, but not polygamy and bride wealth; the sanctions associated with African communal life, but not the blood feud or trial by ordeal. Accordingly, missionary thought often envisaged that traditional African society, once shorn of its grossest abuses and infused with Christianity, would represent a

more desirable cultural alternative and a better base for future development than the increasingly secular, urban, and industrial European society. As rationalism and religious modernism swept the old world, Africa presented an opportunity to build anew the church of Christ in a more congenial, essentially pre-modern environment. Far from embracing modernity, missionaries felt constrained to resist it at numerous points, and this imperative set definite limits on their role as conscious change agents in African society.

A measure of confirmation for such a view arises from an examination of anti-mission protests, which derived at least as much from opposition to missionary limits on African access to modern Western culture as from attacks on customary ways of life. Such protests, at least in Kenya, focused on a variety of mission policies, including opposition to Africans wearing European clothing, artificially low wages and prohibition on trading opportunities for African employees, reluctance to offer instruction in English, and failure to develop sufficiently high standard of education (Strayer, 1973). Africans, then, insisted on a wider range of modern cultural, educational, and economic opportunities than many missionaries were willing to grant.

Where, then, should mission history go from here? The variety of outcomes generated by the mission-African encounter suggests the need for more explicitly comparative studies. Which forms of mission Christianity were most open to a dialogue with and an adaptation to African religion? Under what conditions were African societies most likely to seek religious points of contact with missionaries? What are the major variables that account for differences in the stance of mission groups toward the colonial situation, and what real impact did these differences have? Perhaps such inter-African comparisons might some day contribute to a world historical comparison of the tremendous success of Christianity in Africa in relation to its general failure in Asia. We are in fact beginning to get some studies with an important comparative dimension. On the mission side of the encounter, Wright (1971) has described the very different mission communities that emerged from Monrovia and Berlin Mission activity in southern Tanganyika, while Daneel (1971) has related the theological differences between the Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed missions to the relative cohesiveness of their Rhodesian churches. Equally important are the variations on the African side of the encounter. J.D.Y. Peel (1967) probed certain social and historical differences within Yorubaland in order to account for the differential receptivity

to Christianity there. Ranger and Weller (1975: 9) have suggested that “responses to missionaries varied because what was needed from them in terms of myth and ritual and symbol and technique varied also”. Concepts of an active High God, witchcraft eradication techniques, means of ensuring rainfall, the fulfilment of millennial expectations, as well as differences in social, economic, and political circumstances will need to be considered in explaining the African response to missionary intrusion.

In conclusion, the vitality of mission history today derives from its linkages to the major themes of African history generally. Insofar as it is able to draw from and contribute to the discussion of such critical issues as religious history, social change, and political protest, mission studies will remain an important dimension of the African historical landscape.

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AFRICAN CONVERSION: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

By Brendan Carmody

Introduction

In the pages which follow I hope to provide the contours of the landscape of conversion to Christianity and Islam in Africa. It is intended to historically contextualize what constitutes a major religious phenomenon with significant personal and social consequences. It also aims to be heuristic rather than comprehensive, raising rather than treating issues in depth. Conversion in this context will be taken to mean major religious change in terms of a shift from an African religious worldview to Christianity and Islam. In doing this, it is worth keeping in view Strayer's classification of the phases of mission history notably metropolitan-ecclesiastical, nationalist, and encounter. For the most part, we will be operating from within the metropolitan-ecclesiastical perspective (Strayer 1976).

African Cosmology

A handicap of traditional African religion is that, unlike Christianity and Islam, it has few written records. Yet, the continent clearly had a rich heritage of what might be termed pre-Christian or pre-Islamic religions. Besides the absence of written records, it appears that African languages had no word for religion. What however seems clear is that the various traditions had symbol systems that enabled people find meaning and direction in their lives. This often entailed 'participation' or the ritual enactment of mythical events and the fusing of participants' self-identities with those of mythical beings (Bellah 2008). Differentiated religious organizations did not appear to exist. Instead, religion constituted part of the larger framework.

Such worldviews were portrayed in a non-historic way. This partly resulted from the absence of written records combined with lack of appreciation for the development of oral traditions. For earlier times, we rely on the reconstruction through travelers' accounts, linguistic evidence, and oral traditions. (Isitechi 2004, 5) Traditional African religions as they were located do not thus look back to a founder nor do they provide a normative tradition where beliefs and practices are frozen (Fisher 2001, 34). They did not seek converts. They rather provided worldviews which did not exclude as they tend to be 'this worldly' and pragmatic but usually included speculation on the afterlife.

Conversion to Christianity: The Early Centuries

In the Acts of the Apostles (8:26-38), we meet the beginning of the early Christian church as it came into contact with Africa. The Church in Egypt is thought to have been established by St. Mark. However reliable this may be, what we find is that there was a rapid growth of churches. By 68 A.D., Christians from Egypt and Libya gathered in Alexandria to celebrate Easter. Christianity appealed perhaps because it was both like the old religion that people knew and it offered the prospect of liberation to an oppressed population of first century Egypt (Baur 1994, 24; Sundkler 2000, 18). It also appears true that it was attractive because it offered promise of a joyful afterlife. This concern with the afterlife might explain why early Christianity in Egypt developed a Monastic spirituality where one of the earliest monks was Antony (251-356).

Christianity spread westwards in the second and third centuries mainly to the Berber peoples of North Africa. By 300 A.D., Egypt had about eighty bishops. At this time however Christians faced severe persecution in Rome and elsewhere which ended in 313 with the famous Edict of Milan, after the conversion of the emperor, Constantine, in 303 (Hastings 1967, 52-55).

Early Disputes

During these centuries, a theological school developed in Alexandria which became a place of much learning with teachers that included Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian. As the Christian church expanded, different doctrines were generated which needed to be evaluated in the light of the Gospels and other New Testament writings that had been accepted as normative by the end of the first century. Among the issues that caused confusion was the question: If Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he had a beginning. Did this mean that there was a time when he did not exist like any of us? Theologians debated this. Arius, a young priest, taught that there was a time when Jesus was not God. Other theologians disagreed. To solve this issue, Constantine, the emperor, called a meeting or Council at Nicea in 325 where it was judged that Arius was wrong in saying that Jesus was not always God. Many Egyptians, however, supported Arius and so did not accept the new doctrine.

This led to further questions about Jesus. If he was always God, how could he also be human? If for instance Jesus was God he would have known the future. Perhaps Jesus only appeared to be human. It was said that he was always God

but sometimes took on the appearance of being a human being. This again led to much debate and once more the dilemma was resolved by calling another Council—this time at Chalcedon in 451. The issue was: Was Christ both divine and human or was he perhaps only divine? The Council decided that Christ was both divine and human. However, once again, many of the Egyptian bishops refused to accept this new doctrine believing that Jesus was solely divine. This doctrine is called monophysitism. Later, the Coptic Church sought independence and so we have the first independent African church.

Another avenue of large-scale disagreement in the North African Church at this period was that of Donatism. This emerged because many Christians had been persecuted by the Romans. To show loyalty to Rome, emperors Diocletian and Maximinus demanded signs—handing over of the scriptures. If somebody refused, they were convicted. Some of those persecuted yielded to infidelities and one of these was a bishop called Felix.

When the bishop of Carthage died in 311, Caecilian was selected to take his place and was consecrated as bishop by Felix. However, people did not accept the authority of Felix to ordain. Instead, they found another bishop who, instead of Caecilian, ordained Majorinus who was later succeeded by Donatus. This led to the question: If a priest or bishop is unfaithful, does this mean that he cannot minister legitimately? Those who supported Donatus claimed that the ordaining bishop had to be without blemish. This controversy was eventually resolved with the help of Saint Augustine so that at the Council of Carthage in 411 Donatism was condemned (Baur 1994, 28).

These early controversies are significant because they divided the early North African Church which was constituted by three main groups: Berbers, Phoenicians, and Romans. From 146 AD when the Romans captured the city of Carthage, North Africa, that is, Numidia (Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco) was dominated by a Roman culture. This had consequences for the conversion process in so far as it failed to engage the non-Romans (Hastings 1994, 67-70; Colson 1987, 3). In discussing the development of the Church in North Africa over this period, could it be true that, as Baur (1994, 25) suggests, the basic problem with the Councils of Chalcedon, Nicea, and Carthage was that they spoke in abstract terms using Greek philosophy while the Copts were more concrete thinkers? In any case, for Alexandria and Egypt, the Greco-Roman approach of the Western Church led to a parting of the ways.

Conversion to Islam

In considering the history of conversion to Christianity we meet the Arab conquest linked to the spread of Islam in the seventh century. This sets an important milestone. From its beginning, Islam spread rapidly through Egypt and North Africa (Maghreb). This expansion of Islam in areas that had been Christianized is perhaps best seen in the light of the controversies which we have already noted. Many Christians did not feel well included in the evolving Christian Church and are said to have welcomed Islam where they could feel more at home. Moreover, Islam provided Berber pastoralists with a sense of brotherhood. Subsequently, those who refused to convert to Islam were penalized. They had for instance to pay high taxes and were barred or evicted from positions in government (Baur 1994, 26).

By the twelfth century Christians had practically disappeared from North Africa. In Egypt, although Christians continued to form about half the population, they were gradually reduced to a minority. For centuries, Christianity withstood the Islamic movement in eastern Sudan but in the fourteenth century this changed (Jomier 1988, 30; Shaw 1996, 96). It seems true that on the highlands of Ethiopia, Christianity survived through the centuries. Between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries, Ethiopian rulers were under periodic attacks from Muslims starting with the Sultan of Shoa (Baur 1994, 28). This continued until 1543 when they won a victory over the Muslims with the help of the Portuguese (Baur 1994, 28; Shaw 1996, 98-105; Hastings 1994, 55-62).

Conversion to Islam in East Africa happened through men of religion who communicated primarily with local rulers. Often such rulers became the first recipients of Islamic influence and so Islam came to East Africa largely through merchants who were part of the Indian ocean trading diaspora. Their commercial connections were with lands around the coast rather than with the interior, so that by the time of the arrival of Europeans many of the coastal towns were Muslim. Many Muslims settled on the islands of Zanzibar and at places like Kilwa and Pemba. Islam however made little progress in the interior until the nineteenth century. There was therefore no formation of centralized states which served as launching pads for proselytization. Between the tenth and the fourteenth centuries the term 'swahili' came to denote a distinctive coastal society that was Islamic in religion and culture but primarily African in language and personnel. It was a city-based coastal trading culture.

Islam and Trade

As the camel revolutionized desert transport, the products of sub-Saharan Africa became more available. The trade in West African gold expanded as did the trade in ivory, ostrich feathers and furs. The main trading routes were from Morocco to Ghana, Tunis to Goa and Tripoli to Lake Chad (Shillington 2012, 85). With the expansion of cross desert trade a number of centres were developed among which were Timbuktu, Goa, and Jenne. The most important commercial area was the kingdom of ancient Ghana from the fifth century onwards. The Soninke were ideally placed to exploit a growth in trade mainly of salt and gold to and from the Sahara. Though the ruler of ancient Ghana refused to abandon the religion of his ancestors, he allowed Muslim traders to settle in his territory and so Soninke merchants were some of the earliest converts. However, although not direct agents of Islam, they carried their new faith far and wide (Shillington 2012, 85-93).

By the twelfth century, Ghana lost its pre-eminent trading position and was superseded by Mali. A Muslim presence had already been established in what is present day Ivory Coast, Ghana, Gambia, Guinea, and Northern Nigeria. In Mali, higher learning was fostered. People like Mansa Musa (1312-37) were employed at court and Timbuktu became a centre of intellectual life. Mansa Musa's trip to Mecca in 1324 is remembered for all the gold he brought. Mali's Islamic development interested Ibn Battutah and so he visited in 1352. He was impressed mainly with the public prayer on Fridays as well as the celebration of Muslim feasts, but criticized the quality of conversion because of the continuation of pre-Islamic traditions.

In the fourteenth century, the power of the Mansas declined when the kingdom was attacked by the Mossi. As a result, Songhay rose to dominance. With the decline of Mali, Songhay showed its independence. The empire reached the peak of its power in the early sixteenth century. In 1591, however, Songhay was invaded by Morocco after which the former empire split into a number of independent states such as Bambarra, Kanem, Bornu, Ife, Oyo, Benin, and Dahomey. This in turn led to the fermentation of nationalism which expressed itself in jihads in the nineteenth century (Shillington 2012, 93-113).

Islam in a New Mode

The rise of Islamic militancy marked a radical departure from earlier patterns. In the highlands of Futa Jalon (Guinea today), the Fulbe, a pastoral people, were

mainly responsible for the jihad movement in large part because of increased herd tax. Islamic revolt became a way of protesting. Jihads like those of the Futa Jalon and Futa Toro entailed the rise of peasants against local rulers. From the jihads emerged a Muslim state called the Sokoto caliphate which consisted of a number of Muslim emirates. In this movement, the leadership of Uthman dan Fodio championed the difficulties of the peasants and pressed for the purification of Islam (Shillington 2012, 230-233; Jomier 1988, 37).

By the early part of the nineteenth century trade routes like Tabora and Ujiji developed in East Africa as a response to the rising demand for slaves and ivory. As traders set up trading posts, they married local wives or had children with local women so that Islam began to spread even to places like Uganda. Buganda is the only centralized state that might have experienced patterns of Islamization like those of West Africa. Kabaka Mutesa came under Muslim influence but the spread of Islam was arrested with the British conquest. This may have been somewhat exceptional for in general the spread of Islam accelerated during the colonial period. Further south, the Yao became the most Islamized people in the interior of Mozambique and Southern Tanzania. In the deeper south, as early as 1652, Muslims arrived in the Cape mainly from Indonesia.

The nineteenth century witnessed a Mahdist movement in Sudan which centred on the declaration by Muhammad bin Abd Allah Ahmad, a holy man, that he was the Mahdi. He, like others before him, was intent on restoring the purity of the conversion to Islam. He called for a jihad and the Mahdist forces took over Khartoum. Ahmad however died at the battle of Odurman in 1898 where the British and Egyptian forces were victorious under the leadership of Kitchener (Shillington 2012, 290-291). Following the defeat, the British allied themselves with the Mahdi's rival and established a state which became independent in 1956. Within it were the seeds of conflict between the ideal of an Islamic and a more secular type of nation state. This has given rise to a long dispute.

By the end of the colonial era, Islam was established in throughout Africa in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Northern Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, and South Africa.

Conversion to Christianity: The Second Phase

While, as we have seen, Christianity lost its ground in North and East Africa over the centuries, it found new opportunities to enter Africa in the fifteenth

century with dramatic improvements in navigation, ship construction, as well as a new curiosity about the unknown regions of the globe. Part of the search for new horizons inspired Prince Henry of Portugal to explore unknown regions across the Atlantic ocean as he wanted to find a sea route to the Indies.

Christianity comes to West-Central Africa

As a result of Prince Henry's interest, a Portuguese captain reached the Senegal river in 1445. Some years later, Diego Cam came to the mouth of the Congo river. Cam took some of the local people from the kingdom of the Congo back to Portugal. These became proficient in Portuguese and returned in 1485 with presents for their king who asked that missionaries from Portugal be sent to his kingdom.

As a result, in 1491, the first missionaries arrived in the Kongo. They were well received. The king, his wife, and eldest son, Alfonso, were quickly baptized. The capital was named San Salvador (Hastings 1994, 71-129; Berman 1975, 1-2).

Nonetheless, among other things, missionary opposition to polygamy was resented. However, when Alphonso became king succeeding his father in 1506, he promoted Christianity along the lines of a royal religious cult (Shillington 1995, 199). By the time of his death many had converted to Catholicism while his own son became a bishop in 1521. It seemed that the Kongo had accepted Christianity even though conversion tended to be little more than a matter of baptism with little real follow up in the formation of a Christian community. Moreover, the priests were few and many of them were unfaithful:

Unfortunately, the life of 'these holy servants' was anything but holy. Although they were regular canons, bound to common life and poverty, they at once started to live in separate houses, which were filled with slave girls (Baur 1994, 58-59).

In an attempt to build up a local church, Portuguese Jesuits arrived late in the late sixteenth century but were poorly received. They started schools, one of which became a significant seminary for the formation of local clergy in Angola in the 1570s. At the time, the need for an educated local clergy formed a significant part of the deliberations of the Council of Trent (1545-1563). As part of their mission, Jesuits also began to produce catechisms and books in the local languages, encouraging the growth of basic literacy and the formation of Christian villages (Baur 1994,74).

Subsequently, the Capuchins, another Catholic religious order like the Jesuits, came to the region. They were not Portuguese. They were Italian and came in response to requests from the king of the Kongo who wished to establish direct links with Rome and thereby become less tied to Portugal (Hastings 1994, 86). In this context, it should be acknowledged that again and again Portugal made attempts to establish permanent missionary settlements on the west coast of Africa and chose missionaries to help the process.

The Capuchins' missionary work continued from 1645 for much of two centuries. They were zealous and preached the gospel with the mentality of that era which entailed an emphasis on baptisms (an estimated 600,000 took place between 1645 and 1700). As was the mindset of the day, they believed that baptism within the Catholic Church was essential for salvation. In their mission, they were greatly assisted by those of the maestros or catechists (Hastings 1994, 92). Perhaps surprisingly, the Capuchins gave little attention to developing a local clergy:

Most disastrous was the absence of any policy in regard to a local clergy. In fact the Capuchins criticized and disapproved so strongly of the behaviour of local priests elsewhere, they could hardly wish to extend them. But what alternative was there if the church was to continue (Hastings 1994, 112).

The widespread desire for baptism would seem to indicate a readiness to become at least nominally Christian. Such baptism could have been readily absorbed by most recipients into an unchanged folk cosmology with little evidence of any major religious change leading to true conversion. Moreover, the Capuchins related poorly with local traditions. It needs to be recognized, however, that these missionaries offered a Christianity which was the fruit of fifteen centuries of development in European culture. The message was poorly distinguished from its cultural wrapping (Hastings 1994, 37). Yet, this happened at a time when the integration of the Christian message with local traditions was part of the Jesuit missions to India and China (Hastings 1994, 87-88). It is true that this mode of evangelization did not endure. Although in 1615 permission had been given for priests to celebrate mass in Chinese and to employ local rites in the evangelization process, very soon the practice was condemned (Hastings 1994, 88, 112).

Despite centuries of missionary work by various groups, Christianity in the Kongo did not take root (Shaw 1996, 112-115). The reasons for this are varied.

The missionary presence may have been too closely linked to Portuguese conquest. The missionaries themselves became involved in slavery even to the point where they blessed departing shiploads of slaves. Many also were sexually unfaithful (Hastings 1967, 55-59). Conversion itself was often no more than nominal while the creation of a community structure was lacking. But according to Neil (1990, 170):

...the real cause of the failure was deeper. No serious attempt seems to have been made to face all that is involved in a mission to non-literates—the need for a deep and accurate knowledge of the language, understanding of customs and mentality, the long and painful instruction that must precede baptism, and the endlessly patient pastoral care that must follow it.

Christianity in East Africa

On the other side of the continent in East Africa the story is not so different. Portugal wanted to develop trade with the East especially in terms of silk, cotton, and tea, and to gain ports and bases on the East African coast. When they first came to East Africa, the Portuguese were impressed by the wealth of the Swahili cities and strove to establish fortresses at places like that of Sofala (Isichei 1995, 70-71). As part of their efforts to find gold, they sent an expedition in 1560 which included a Portuguese Jesuit, Goncalo da Silveira. In Sofala among the Monomatapa, he was initially very successful in gaining the locals' confidence to the point of converting the king. However, this led to jealousy resulting in his death within a short time (Baur 1994, 80-81).

In those days, the Portuguese dreamed that somewhere there was a Christian kingdom. As part of this fantasy, they supported Christians in Ethiopia against the Muslim leader Ibn Ibrahim or Ahmed Gran in 1543 (Sundkler 2000, 73-75). This led to a long alliance between Portugal and Christian-led Ethiopia which included missionary endeavours, some of which were those of the Jesuits.

In 1589 for instance a Jesuit priest, Pedro Paez, came to Ethiopia and was well received. He learned the local language and spent many years of successful mission among the people (Hastings 1994, 148-153). After his death in 1622, he was replaced by another Jesuit, Alphonsus Mendes. Mendes used a very different approach to missionary work that neglected local tradition. He insisted upon the re-ordination of Coptic clergy, rebaptism, and re-consecration of churches

according to the Roman rite. Within a short while, he was expelled (Hastings 1994, 148-169).

There is speculation on how appropriate the approaches of Paez and Mendes were to missionary work but, as Hastings (1994, 157) remarks, though Paez shines in personal terms there seems no evidence that during nearly twenty years in the country he had worked out a constructive strategy to cope with the liturgy or anything else (Shaw 1996, 118-119). After the expulsion of Mendes, Ethiopian Christianity distanced itself from Portuguese influence for almost two centuries.

Conversion and the Rise of Capitalism

As we have indicated, Christian conversion in West and East Africa from the fifteenth century tended to be a somewhat one-sided phenomenon. Despite opportunities to integrate the Christian message with local tradition, missionaries failed to go in that direction. It is hardly surprising therefore that the Christian message was poorly rooted. Moreover, in West Africa, the Christian message became tarnished through missionary links to the Atlantic slave trade. It is to be regretted that missionaries came to be so closely allied to what was perhaps the greatest calamity that Africans faced as an estimated fifteen million were taken from their homes to serve as slaves.

The forest regions of Senegambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, Benin, and Biafra were the main sources of slaves. It is true that slave trading dates back beyond the sixteenth century, but the Portuguese voyages of exploration initiated a regular trade in slaves by sea between Africa and Europe and the Americas. The bulk of these slaves who came to the new world were placed on sugar, tobacco, cotton, and coffee plantations. By the eighteenth century, the slave trade was an important part of world commerce. For Africa, it involved the import of new commodities in exchange for slaves. These included textiles, metal ware, and salt. Later it also included ammunition and this led to an exchange economy. A major consequence was the evolution of a class that depended on European commerce, a change in lifestyle and foodstuff such as the adoption of cassava and maize.

In the late eighteenth century, after the public had for too long ignored the evils and horrors of the slave trade, anti-slavery ideology emerged. Before this, very few doubted the justice of the slave trade. 'Good' Christians had simply urged the slave masters to treat their slaves with charity and forbearance even though

there were voices of protest (Gray 1990, 11-27). Social change, however, gave rise to newer classes who were receptive to ideas resulting from the convergence of religious, intellectual and literary trends.

In the American colonies, the Quakers were pioneers for abolition not only of the trade but of slavery itself. Their first recorded protest is in 1688 at Germantown, Pennsylvania. Agitation against slavery coincided with the American revolution which ended in 1776. In England also, the Quakers were the first to organize support for abolition where in 1779 Granville Sharp campaigned and brought the matter to the House of Commons. In 1787, he became chairman of the Abolition Committee which included Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce. This group became known as the Clapham Sect and managed to get the anti-slavery bill passed into law in 1808 (Berman 1975, 3-4; Shillington 2012, 237-343).

As the nineteenth century progressed, Europe developed a new interest in Africa, as evidenced by the explorations of Henry Stanley to East Africa and David Livingstone to South Central Africa (Hastings 1994, 250-253). As part of this revival of interest in Africa, Leopold II of Belgium advocated a united front against the slave trade. In 1885, he also called for the Berlin Conference where various European powers sought control of different African territories (Shillington 2012, 312-327).

Conversion and Colonialism

The imposition of colonial rule aided the missionaries both Christian and Islamic. Often colonial administrators and missionaries came from the same background and had a similar mindset. Colonial rule assured missionaries of some stability and order and allowed some new socio-economic structures to emerge (Berman 1975, 25-28).

Christianity develops in West Africa

The judgment of the British chief justice Lord Mansfield in 1772 declared that British law did not permit slavery. This became a cornerstone in the liberation of slaves (Baur 1994:110). Many former slaves were set free. Most of the liberated slaves were both homeless and unemployed. The idea of settling them in their places of origin seemed like a way forward (Shillington 2012, 312-327). Thus in 1787 a party of such people in North America set sail for the West African coast.

Most of these were Christians—Methodists and Baptists. For many of these liberated people, Sierra Leone was not the end of the journey—they looked further afield. Freetown however became identified as the city of churches and mosques.

In 1804, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) set up a base in Freetown. This was influenced by Henry Venn who worked towards the ideal of an independent church which was perhaps the foundation of what later was called Ethiopianism. From this perspective, a college was opened at Fourah Bay in 1827 where many church personnel were trained. This institution paralleled what happened in places like Harvard in New England. Fourah Bay began to offer degrees in 1876 through the University of Durham. The CMS aimed to develop legitimate trade along the lines of what was known as the Niger expedition, the first of which took place in 1841 (Shaw 1996, 155-157).

Much of the early life of the CMS in Sierra Leone and beyond is associated with a man named Samuel Crowther (1806-1892) who was an early student at Fourah Bay College. As a minister he worked among the Yoruba and perhaps largely because of the philosophy and backing of Henry Venn became a bishop in 1864 (Hastings 1994, 343-349). The early Christian mission sprang from the settlement at Sierra Leone and spread inland through the Niger delta. The Christian message was brought by Yoruba exiles to Yoruba. This opened the way to the establishment of the Scottish Presbyterian Mission in Calabar in 1847 which was to become a significant educational centre.

As in Sierra Leone, a similar initiative prompted a mission in Liberia where, some thirty years after Sierra Leone, black settlers arrived in 1820. This was followed in 1847 with the founding of the Republic. The Afro-American settlers in Monrovia maintained a belief in their special role as citizens of West Africa's only free country, Liberia. They saw themselves as representing civilization. From here the prophet William Wade Harris (1865-1929) brought the Christian message to the Ivory Coast and Ghana (Hastings 1994, 443-449).

In Ghana (the Gold Coast), the Basle Mission of Swiss and German missionaries set up base in 1828. This mission flourished in the later part of the nineteenth century. Catholic missionaries also entered the field around this time as a result of the Catholic missionary movement in France and the formation of various religious groups such as those of the Spiritans (CSSp), the SMAs (Society of Missions to Africa), the so-called White Fathers, and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMIs). One of the pioneers was Joseph Liberman whose

labors led to the development of a Catholic missionary presence in various West African countries including Nigeria under Bishop Shanahan among the Igbo (Baur 1994, 150).

Christianity's Growth in East Africa

The work of the Protestant missionaries in East Africa dates back to Ludwig Krapf and Johann Rebman both of whom were members of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Somewhat like Livingstone, Krapf hoped that he might find a river which would provide a gateway to the African interior. In this context, the Zambezi expedition was not unlike that of the Niger 1840/1. Both were intended to supplant the slave trade with legitimate commerce (Isichei 1995,138).

After the British Abolition Act, slavery remained an important part of life in East Africa. The main slave routes were from Bagamoyo through Tabora to Lake Victoria, Kilwa to Lake Nyasa and Meru, as well as from Mombasa to Lake Victoria. The trade used caravans which could include about one thousand people. It is said that the slave trade in East Africa reached its peak in the nineteenth century. Its victims worked in Zanzibar's clove plantations, in the sugar fields of Mauritius and Reunion, or were exported to Brazil.

At one point the French decided to start a garrison on the island of Zanzibar and to send French Holy Ghost Fathers there to maintain a centre for freed slaves at Bagamoyo in 1868. The CMS set up a similar haven for freed slaves in Mombasa called Freretown. At this time, the explorer Henry Stanley came to Zanzibar. During this expedition, he met with Mutesa on the northern side of Lake Victoria and urged the CMS to start a mission in Baganda in 1876. However, at about the same time, the Roman Catholic White Fathers started a mission among the Baganda. Despite numerous petitions not to do so from the CMS, the White Fathers went ahead which marked the beginning of an era of denominational rivalry.

In 1879, Mutesa rejected Christianity in favour of Islam, principally because the Christian missionaries did not bring him the firearms he desired. A few years later, when Mutesa's son, Mwanga, came to the throne, he blamed Christians for his country's misfortunes and launched persecutions, the majority of which took place in 1886 (Isichei 1995:147). Charles Lwanga was the leader of those who were burned to death, symbolizing a major milestone in the Christian conversion of Africa (Hastings 1994, 375-385).

Neither the sultan of Zanzibar nor his Arab brothers wanted the slave trade to end and so made an all out effort to capture East Africa. They did this with the help of the slave trader, Tippu Tip (Groves 1964, 129-34; Shillington 2012, 259-260). While he claimed to be on the British side in this affair, he was secretly supporting the Arabs. Because of pressure and persecution from Arab factions, the CMS had to close their mission at Ujiji in 1884.

Early Days of Christianity in South Africa

In 1652, the Dutch East Africa Company sent van Riebeeck to establish a supply post at the Cape. The Dutch East Africa Company took their faith with them and introduced it to the people. Among the first missionaries to the Cape was a member of the Moravian Brethren, George Schmidt who settled among the Hottentots and taught them. He was also ready to baptize those who desired it. This was not well received by the settlers and they questioned his authority to baptize and forced him to leave. Any further mission at the Cape was delayed for fifty or so years when the Moravians opened up a mission at Genadendal.

The London Missionary Society (LMS) came to South Africa in 1799 under the leadership of Vanderkemp. He also set up a mission among the Hottentots at Bethelsdorp. He was critical of the treatment of these people at the hands of the Boers. Among other things, he criticized the ownership of slaves for he preached the equality of all people before God. The LMS began to be seen as protectors of the Hottentots. They further extended their mission to the Xhosas where they set up an educational institution at Lovedale in 1841 which was designed to prepare local ministers of religion. As part of the mission expansion, John Phillip and Robert Moffat settled at Kuruman in 1817 among the Bechuana. Moffat was a major influence on the great explorer and missionary, David Livingstone. (Shaw 1996, 167-170; Groves 1964, 120, 161-005; Sanneh 1993, 105-117).

Subsequent to when the British occupied the Cape in 1814, many Boers trekked northward (Shillington 2012, 274-279). During the Great Trek, the Dutch Reform Church had to decide how peoples of colour would be treated. Would they become part of the one church? The Cape Synod of the Church resolved in 1857 that it was in accord with scripture that others should be included with existing congregations, when possible, but where this might be a problem they could have separate meetings. Among other missionary groups that settled in South Africa were the Anglican Church and the Catholic Churches. The Oblate

Fathers and Trappist monks were among the Catholic missionaries.

The Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902 caused much devastation ending in a British victory. Yet, in 1910 the four states Natal, the Orange Free State, Cape and Transvaal became a union. This in turn led to the formation of the Afrikaner state of 1948 when apartheid became the predominant ideology. The Dutch Reformed Church supported apartheid and came to see itself supporting civilization against the infidel, especially communism. It is not surprising that South Africa during these years was the birthplace of many independent churches among which were those classified as Zionist, Ethiopian, and Black Messiah (Hastings 1994, 493-539; Berman 1975, 34-39).

Conversion in the Twentieth Century

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the population of Africa was approximately 32 per cent Muslim and 9 per cent Christian. As the century ended, it had become 40 per cent Muslim and 45 per cent Christian (Barrett et al 2001, 14). Conversion to Christianity continues where it is estimated that daily there is an increase of 22,000 (Gifford 2008, 276). This includes both conversion to mainline Churches and to fast growing Pentecostal-type movements (Garrard 2009). In light of this survey of the history of African conversion and its slow momentum till the end of the nineteenth century, it is appropriate to ask why the conversion rate accelerated so much in the twentieth century? This clearly is a major question which Robin Horton, (1971) among others, has attempted to address. Horton posited that it has been largely the result of the growth of modernity linked to the development of the mission school (Baur 1994, 273; Berman 1975, 7-12, 15-20; Colson 2006, 118; Carmody 2013, Hastings 1967, 81-88).

Conclusion

From our review of the history of African conversion, it appears evident that religious conversion has been strongly linked to Strayer's metropolitan-ecclesiastical perspective on history, reminding us of how western religion and the culture in which it was embedded were normative, leaving little room for African voices. In Strayer's post-nationalistic phase, ownership of conversion may have begun through inculturation and liberation theology. However, the challenge to remain authentically African in the face of large-scale globalization of the Christian and Islamic message appears to be ongoing.

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AFRICAN CONVERSION

By Robin Horton

I begin with a sketch of what I shall brashly call the 'typical traditional cosmology'. The core of this cosmology is a system of ideas about unobservable personal beings whose activities are alleged to underpin the events of the ordinary, everyday world. Applied to this world, the system enables its users to see identities of process underlying apparent diversity, and to chart causal regularities underlying apparent anomaly. In short, it provides an impressive instrument for explanation, prediction and control.

The salient feature of the system is its two-tiered arrangement of unobservables. In the first tier we find the lesser spirits, which are in the main concerned with the affairs of the local community and its environment, i.e., with the microcosm. In the second tier we find a supreme being concerned with the world as a whole, i.e., with the macrocosm. Just as the microcosm is part of the macrocosm, so the supreme being is defined as the ultimate controller and existential ground of the lesser spirits.

In many (though not all) areas, the religious situation of the pre-Islamic, pre-Christian phase is characterised by a rich proliferation of ideas about the lesser spirits and their modes of action. Most events, fortunate or unfortunate, are attributed to their agency. Certain categories of them are thought to underpin and sanction human morality. There is a wealth of techniques for approaching and manipulating them. Ideas about the supreme being tend to be thinner and vaguer. Few events are directly attributed to him. He seldom has a direct concern with human morality. Techniques for approaching him are poorly developed.

If what I have said about the respective domains of spirits and supreme being is put in the context of some elementary facts about the pre-modern social situation, this difference between the two tiers of the cosmology becomes readily understandable.

The essence of the pre-modern situation is that most events affecting the life of the individual occur within the microcosm of the local community, and that this microcosm is to a considerable extent insulated from the macrocosm of the wider world. Since most significant social interaction occurs within the local community, moral rules tend to apply within this community rather than universally i.e., within the microcosm rather than within the macrocosm.

Given the association of lesser spirits with microcosm and supreme being with macrocosm, it follows from these facts that the former will be credited with direct responsibility for most events of human concern, will be the primary guardians of morality, and will be the objects of constant approach by human beings, whilst the latter will be credited with direct responsibility for relatively few events of human concern, will have no direct association with morality, and will seldom be approached by human beings.

Because this brief sketch shows the traditional cosmology working in and conditioned by its social environment, it gives us a means of predicting how traditional religious ideas will respond to certain changes in this environment. Indeed, it gives us the means of performing a most interesting thought-experiment.

The essence of the experiment is that we confront the traditional cosmology with an imaginary set of changes, and use our model of its working to predict its response. The changes in question are imaginary rather than actual because they involve certain gross subtractions from historical reality. Thus they involve the introduction of various features of the modern situation, *minus* Islam and Christianity. They involve the massive development of commerce and of nation states, *without* the concomitant influx of Islamic and Christian proselytisers. For our purposes their most important consequences are dramatic improvements in communications, with accompanying economic and political developments that override the boundaries between the various microcosms. Such developments lure a great many people away from their microcosms and set them down in a wider world. To a greater or lesser extent, they confront even the stay-at-homes with a weakening of the boundaries which formerly insulated. Now on the basis of our model, we can predict that such changes will affect the traditional cosmology in the following ways:

1. As an explanatory system, traditional religious thought is closely adjusted to a particular set of social circumstances. At the same time, in the largely unelaborated concept of the supreme being, as well as in various other respects, it has considerable adaptive potential. Hence, faced with the interpretative challenge of social change, its adherents do not just abandon it in despair. Rather, they remould and develop it until it attains, once more, its pristine level of explanatory coverage. The end result, therefore, is as much an instrument of explanation-prediction-control as was the pre-change cosmology.

2. If thousands of people find themselves outside the microcosms, and if even those left inside see the boundaries weakening if not actually dissolving, they can only interpret these changes by assuming that the lesser spirits (underpinners of the microcosms) are in retreat, and that the supreme being (underpinner of the macrocosm) is taking over direct control of the everyday world. Hence they come to regard the lesser spirits as irrelevant or downright evil. Hence, too, they develop a far more elaborate theory of the supreme being and his ways of working in the world, and a battery of new ritual techniques for approaching him and directing his influence.
3. As more and more people become involved in social life beyond the confines of their various microcosms, they begin to evolve a moral code for the governance of this wider life. Since the supreme being is already defined as the arbiter of everything that transcends the boundaries of the microcosms, he is seen as underpinning this universalist moral code. From a position of moral neutrality, he moves to one of moral concern.
4. In the traditional cosmology, lesser spirits and supreme being are defined in strongly contrasted terms. Hence relations between man and spirits and relations between man and supreme being are seen as different in kind. In consequence, ritual approaches to the supreme being take forms quite distinct from those of approaches to the spirits. This distinction is already evident in the rudimentary cult of the supreme being practised in the prechange situation. It becomes more obvious when the cult is elaborated in response to change.
5. Most of the developments described above are matters of degree rather than of kind. Hence there is an infinite number of potential positions between traditional religious life and the full-blooded monolatric cult of a morally concerned supreme being.

The particular position taken up by a given individual will depend largely on the degree to which, in his own personal life, the boundaries of the microcosm have ceased to confine him. Thus if he continues to live in his own local community, engaged in an occupation such as farming, the greater part of his religious life is still likely to be taken up by the cult of the lesser spirits. His ritual approaches to the supreme being are likely to be intermittent and of marginal importance to him. If he continues to live in his own community, but engages in a 'modern' occupation like keeping a hardware store which is more highly integrated with the economy of the macrocosm, the cult of the spirits will be

a little less important to him, and the cult of the supreme being a little more important. Finally, if he goes to work outside his own community, as well as engaging in a 'modern' occupation, the cult of the lesser spirits is likely to be overshadowed by that of the supreme being.

In this matter of individual cosmological adjustment, the philosophers of traditional religious belief are in a rather peculiar position. Nearly every traditional cosmology has its philosophers, people who see the system as a whole and with all of its ramifying implications for the world. Most frequently they are to be found among the diviners; but they also crop up among the cult priests and even among ordinary laymen. The pragmatic majority of the population tends to rely on such people for exposition of the cosmology in its relation to everyday events; and they play a crucial part in transmitting it from one generation to another.

Now although the philosophers fill a thoroughly traditional role, the very nature of their involvement with the old cosmology makes it likely that they will be more acutely aware of the interpretative challenge of modern change than anyone else. Some will react by trying to deny change or campaign for its reversal. Others, seeing that what has happened can neither be denied nor reversed, will set to work extending and developing the existing cosmology in such a way as to account for the new social situation and bring it under some sort of control. Hence, even if this new situation does not impinge very directly on their own daily lives, they may become deeply involved with the new developments in cosmology and ritual, and may even take the lead in formulating such developments. Amongst the adherents of the new style cosmology, then, we shall find not only a great many people obviously committed to a 'modern' life, but also a handful who are drawn from the heart of the premodern world. We may even find the moderns being led by the pre-moderns.

Any reader who looks carefully at our thought-experiment will notice one rather striking thing about it; although it deliberately omits all reference to Islam and Christianity, the cosmological and ritual changes which it describes are those more usually attributed to the efforts of emissaries of the two world religions. The obvious inference is that acceptance of Islam and Christianity is due as much to development of the traditional cosmology in response to other features of the modern situation as it is to the activities of the missionaries.

Equally worth noting is the fact that, whilst the changes described are broadly such as the missionaries would be happy to claim as the fruits of their own work,

there are both additions and omissions with which they would be less than happy. But if we look at the actual story of Islam and Christianity in Africa, we see that it is one of highly conditional and selective acceptance. Indeed, it is marked by much the same additions and omissions as we find in the results of our thought-experiment. It would appear, then, that the beliefs and practices of the so-called world religions are only accepted where they happen to coincide with responses of the traditional cosmology to other, non-missionary, factors of the modern situation. Where such beliefs and practices have no counterpart in these responses, they tend to be weakly developed or absent from the life of 'converts'. Again, where responses of the traditional cosmology to other factors of the modern situation have no counterparts in the beliefs and practices of the world religions, they tend to appear as embarrassing additions to the life of 'converts'.

Such a conclusion reduces Islam and Christianity to the role of catalysts, i.e., stimulators and accelerators of changes which were 'in the air' anyway; triggers for reactions in which they do not always appear amongst the end-products. But although it sounds extreme and does in fact contain an element of caricature, it nevertheless provides us with a theory that accounts very effectively for the failures as well as for the successes of the two world religions.

First of all, it explains why both Islam and Christianity, operating by themselves, produce very meagre results. At the same time, it explains the dramatic improvements that occur as soon as other features of the modern situation are added to the mix.

Secondly, it shows why African populations reject what Peel calls the 'other worldliness' of modern Western Christianity, or what I would prefer to call its renunciation of the functions of explanation, prediction, and control. At the same time, it shows why these populations accept from both world religions their tendency toward monolatry, their emphasis on a morally concerned supreme being, and their unfamiliar cultic forms.

Thirdly, it explains why so-called converts to the world religions form a continuum, ranging from the man whose ritual approaches to the supreme being in mosque or church are just an occasional extra in religious life largely taken up with the cult of the lesser spirits, through the man for whom the cult of the supreme being and the cult of the spirits are of about equal importance, to the man whose approaches to the supreme being take up the whole of his religious life. Further, it enables us, having reckoned the degree of an individual's involvement in the

life of the macrocosm, to predict his position on this continuum. It also enables us to account for the small but very significant minority whose religious life does not respond to such a calculus, the philosophers of the traditional religion who so often turn up as prophetic leaders of the modernising majority.

Fourthly, the theory enables us to understand the rather different institutional histories of Islam and Christianity in Africa. As I have said, it casts the world religions in the role of catalysts; and it seems to me that the fates of these religions as institutional bodies are very much determined by the extent of their willingness to accept this role.

During the more recent part of its African career, Islam seems to have been fairly content with its catalytic role. It has been tolerant in allowing the individual to make his own particular selection from official doctrines. It has accepted that those who come to the mosque form a continuum rather than a band of total converts; and it does not nag excessively at those who lie towards the pagan end of the continuum. Added to all this, it has never itself renounced a concern with the explanation, prediction, and control of space-time events. Hence it has been able to contain without discomfort the bearers of the range of beliefs portrayed in our thought-experiment, and to expand without throwing off a shower of doctrinally dissenting breakaway sects.

Missionary Christianity, on the other hand, has never been content to play the catalyst. It has been rigid in its insistence on the individual's total acceptance of official doctrines. In particular, having renounced the functions of explanation, prediction, and control, it does not tolerate seers and faith-healers within its ranks, and is equally severe with their followers. Hence the orthodox churches find themselves continually discomfited by a great many of their adherents; and the latter, in turn, feel great discomfort within the walls of the churches. The result is the proliferation of dissenting breakaway sects that Peel and others have described so vividly.

A final problem on which the general approach advocated here seems to throw some light is that posed by the attitude of Aladura-type believers, both in Yorubaland and elsewhere, to Western cosmological doctrines. On the face of it, this attitude is paradoxical. Thus, on the one hand, the Aladuras have thrashed out their beliefs, often after much painful heart-searching, in response to radical changes in their own local experience of the world; and having come through this ordeal, they are consciously and proudly 'doing their own African thing'.

Yet, on the other hand, they have a tremendous appetite for certain kinds of Western cosmological literature and testimony. They keenly seek confirmation of their beliefs, not only from the writings of the Western faith-healing sects, but also from those of the Rosicrucians, the Spiritualists, the Theosophists, and other such followers of Western occultism. They listen avidly to accounts by 'been-tos' which stress the vital part played by faith-healing and occultism in the life of Western countries. And they flock to see demonstrations of occult powers given by gentlemen who commonly refer to themselves as 'London Trained Professor'.

Attribution of this interest in Western cosmologies to missionary influence is not very helpful, since some of the most sought-after texts (the occultist) are thoroughly disapproved of by the emissaries of Western Christianity in Africa. Attribution of the interest to the prestige of Western ideas generally is just as unhelpful, precisely because it is a highly selective interest. More fruitful, I think, is a continuation of the approach which sees recent developments in African belief and ritual as responses of the traditional cosmology to the successive interpretative challenges posed by modern social change.

The typical traditional cosmology, under the catalytic influence of Islam and Christianity, has made a vigorous response to the challenge posed by the weakening of microcosmic boundaries. Having successfully met this first interpretative challenge, however, it is immediately confronted with a second challenge from which it was previously immune, the challenge of a Western view of the world based on an impersonal theoretical idiom. The selective enthusiasm of its adherents for Western cosmological doctrines can be seen as a way of meeting this second challenge.

The adherent of a traditional cosmology is seldom confronted with any of the various impersonal theoretical systems which commonly fall under the heading of 'Western Materialism'. And even when he is so confronted, he has very little reason to be disturbed. From his point of view, the foreign exponent of such a system is merely saying that the forces at work in the Euro-American microcosm are very different from the forces at work in, say, a Yoruba microcosm; a proposition which his existing beliefs would in any case incline him to accept. If anything of this kind could trouble the adherent of a traditional cosmology, it might be the foreigner's assumption that there was no such person as a supreme being. For here, both parties would be talking about a single macrocosm, and would be disputing the nature of the forces underpinning it. For the traditionalist,

however, even this sort of dispute would have limited significance, since the forces underpinning the macrocosm play a relatively minor part in his total scheme of thought. All this makes the traditionalist more or less impervious to the challenge of materialism.

The adherent of the developed, 'Aladura' type of cosmology, on the other hand, has no such immunity. In the first place, because of improved international communication, he experiences many more confrontations with Western Materialism than does his traditionalist counterpart. In the second place, because the supreme being and the macrocosm are central rather than peripheral to his cosmology, materialist accounts of the impersonal forces underpinning the macrocosm strike at the very core of his beliefs.

At this point, we can begin to see why the Aladura believer has such a need to seek confirmation, not only from the writings of the Western faith-healing sects, but also from those of the occultists. For both of these sources, contradicting the materialists, assert that the core of the Western world-view is a theoretical model of the macrocosm based on personal forces; and both present a theoretical scheme which is concerned with the explanation, prediction, and control of space-time events. For Aladuras, occultism is in some ways even more fascinating than Western faith-healing. One reason is that it deals in a very satisfying way with the question of materialism, branding it as a superficial and peripheral phenomenon, a facade behind which the real leaders of Western thought operate with a personal model of the world and its working, a screen which conceals the precious inner truth from vulgar eyes. Another reason is that it deals elaborately with lesser spirits, which still feature prominently in many of the developed African cosmologies - even if only as evil beings whom man has to fight with the aid of God. A third reason is that many occultist works have a strong preoccupation with the magical and creative power of the word, a preoccupation which remains central to most Aladura belief-systems.

Since a great many adherents of Aladura-type cosmologies now pay extended visits to Western countries, and since faith-healing and occultist sects are pretty marginal to present-day Western life, we may well wonder why returnees from such visits seem strengthened rather than disillusioned in their conviction that the beliefs of these sects represent the core of Western cosmology. One answer may be that, for various reasons, such visitors gravitate to those limited sectors of Western society for whom faith-healing and occultism have particular

importance. Another answer is that, like Western anthropologists visiting Africa, they simply tend to mistake the marginal for the central and vice versa, through insufficient awareness of context. Yet another answer is that they are heirs to an ancient tradition which, in the realm of belief and rite, sees openness as the sign of marginality and secrecy as the sign of centrality. Hence the seedy furtiveness and the atmosphere of conspiracy which surround the world of the occult in a city like London appear to them as signs that this world represents, not some dilapidated side-alley of Western thought, but its very core. For all these reasons, they are apt to return to Africa confirmed in the beliefs with which they left its shores.

All peoples are shaken and discomfited when confronted with the bearers of alien belief-systems. In the past, Muslims and Christians from north of the Sahara sought to rid themselves of the discomfort caused them by the bearers of African cosmologies through Jihads and frenzied missionary activities. Today, though of necessity they have to go about things more subtly, foreign bearers of the two world religions are still at the task of attempting to eliminate these disquieting cosmologies. The Aladuras are equally discomfited by their confrontation with Western Materialism; but, being in no position to mount Jihads or missionary campaigns in the West, they have to adopt a different strategy for ridding themselves of their discomfort. By seizing eagerly on faith-healing, spiritualism, rosicrucianism, theosophy, and other varieties of occultism as signs that Westerners 'really' adhere to the same basic beliefs as themselves, they manage to persuade themselves that there is no confrontation and hence no threat.

At this point, I think, the traditional African cosmology reaches the limit of its potential for expansion and development. As I have argued in common with many other sociologists, the advent of modern industrial society must sooner or later make for depersonalisation of the idiom of all theory. In Africa, as in the West, it seems likely that religion, if it survives, will do so as a way of communion, but not as a system of explanation, prediction, and control.

(Abridged version)

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CONVERSION RECONSIDERED:

Some Historical Aspects of Religious Conversion in Black Africa

By Humphrey J. Fisher

This paper had its genesis in the recent thoughtful and stimulating article by Robin Horton on African conversion; the core of his argument is summarised below. Horton's evidence is chiefly drawn from Christian African experience, though he seeks to generalise from it for both Islam and Christianity. My specific purpose here is to look more closely at the phenomenon of Muslim conversion, and to see what light this may throw on Horton's argument. In particular, he has, I think, overestimated the survival admittedly in considerably developed forms, of original African elements of religion; and more important, has underestimated the willingness and ability of Africans to make even rigorous Islam and Christianity their own. My other, general, purpose is to suggest that such Muslim/Christian comparative approach is extended further, I hope not rashly, with brief considerations of conversion in the ancient world, and of the effects of literacy.

Reading brought to my attention since this article was first drafted has suggested yet a third alternative: that the fundamental theme is neither the vigorous reconstruction of traditional African belief, nor the effective transplanting of Islam, but rather the development of a higher religious awareness which transcends and subsumes current religious formulations: "the struggle of religious traditions with each other points beyond the present to another form of religious unity which is trying to take shape in such struggles". The theologian Pannenberg develops this line of argument in some detail, suggesting that Christian missions, particularly during their nineteenth century expansion, drew together the different, more or less isolated religious traditions into a world history of religion, not by displacing these traditions, but by helping to bring all religions into relationship, however tense, with one another. Making my first acquaintance with such analysis in contemporary theology, as distinct from the study of religion in Africa, I quickly became persuaded of the possible benefit to Africanists of the broader horizons of universal theology, a benefit upon which, alas, it is beyond my present scope and knowledge adequately to draw. And, while such theology may extend our African view, there is in Africa a

wealth of practical data which has perhaps not yet been sufficiently exploited by theology at large: many of Pannenberg's complaints concerning the comparative phenomenological study of religions, that it detaches forms from historical contexts, treating the latter as inconsequential, etc., might be in part countered by the opportunities for Muslim/Christian comparison in black Africa, where the context is often very similar for both religions. I shall return, as I have already indicated, to this matter of comparison later.

In the course of my article, I should like to break a lance with two doughty knights, often seen in company together, whom we may title the Knight of Eden, and the Phoenix Knight. The Knight of Eden sees in some aboriginal Africa glimpses of that Eden for which the western world, despite increasing secularism (or because of it?) has never ceased to long. The Phoenix Knight sees something of this Eden; its humane socialism, for example, or its essential religious genius, arising from the ashes caused by colonialism, and by 'Jihads and frenzied missionary activities', so that what may appear, for example, as Muslim or Christian in Africa today is in reality the development of that which was inherent in the traditional faiths.

First, then, let us consider the core, or more precisely, the closing stage of Horton's argument. Horton suggests a 'thought-experiment', in which he tries to imagine the development of religion in Africa, during the modern period, in the absence of Christianity and Islam. He argues that traditional religious thought has, particularly in its largely unelaborated concept of the supreme being, considerable adaptive potential. Confronted with various features of the modern situation, such as the massive development of commerce and of nation states, adherents of such thought try to remould and develop it. These people, seeing the older social microcosms weakening or dissolving, 'can only interpret these changes by assuming that the lesser spirits (underpinners of the microcosms) are in retreat, and that the supreme being (underpinner of the macrocosm) is taking over direct control'. People then begin to evolve a moral code for the macrocosm, with which code the supreme being is closely involved.

The obvious inference is that acceptance of Islam and Christianity is due as much to development of the traditional cosmology in response to other features of the modern situation as it is to the activities of the missionaries. It would appear, then, that the beliefs and practices of the so-called world religions are only accepted where they happen to coincide with responses of the traditional

cosmology to other, non-missionary, factors of the modern situation. Such a conclusion reduces Islam and Christianity to the role of catalysts i.e., simulators and accelerators of changes which were 'in the air' anyway, triggers for reactions in which they do not always appear amongst the end-products.

This is the proclamation of the Phoenix Knight most stirring given. For two reasons, I find it difficult to accept. First, I do not see any sound historical reason for expecting that adherents of African traditional faiths will behave as Horton's thought-experiment suggests, that they can only interpret changes in their society in a particular way, that they necessarily evolve a monotheistic moral code for the wider world, and so on. I find two specific difficulties. First, it is hard to distinguish just where 'the pre-Islamic, pre-Christian phase,' 'the pre-modern social situation,' or 'what might be called the "standard" [!] situation' may be found. I fancy I see the plumes of the Knight of Eden among the trees. Even when approximate examples are found, they do not always behave in the way they should: God appears when He ought to lurk in the wings, and loiters when He should be gaining importance. Horton himself remarks on the considerable development of the cult of the supreme being among the Nuer and Dinka, 'even in the pre-Christian, pre-Muslim phase'. Correspondingly, there are societies, as in northern and central Ghana, which had been exposed for long periods to the enlarging effects of international trade; their kola first began arriving in Hausaland in the fifteenth century, and where there has been some Muslim presence as well, sufficient at least as pump-priming for the growth of the cult of the supreme being, but where the evidence for such growth is, at best, ambiguous. In Buganda, the first impact of the large-scale development of foreign commerce seems to have been a strengthening of the divine kingship. When the microcosm really begins to go to pieces, and the macrocosm to thrust itself upon us, we may more easily find a strengthening of witch-finding, and other such practices, than an enhanced respect for the Creator. If there is to be a steady movement towards monotheism, Islam and Christianity have to be much more than catalysts.

To carry these doubts about the potential of Eden a little further, we may suggest that movements of religious reform, or change or development, have been 'in the air' quite often, even in purely pagan situations. Sudden outbursts of enthusiasm leading to any one of a number of reforms; the destruction of fetishes, new witch-finding sweeps, and many others, very probably occurred from time to time, not being simply the creation of European colonial stress and strain. But,

though in the air, these seem rarely to have got permanently off the ground, and once again the apparent implication is that a Muslim or Christian contribution is necessary for such tendencies to be sustained. This may be, in part because for progress to be carried over from one step forward to the next, literacy is necessary: otherwise much of the ground gained may be lost through backsliding later. Literacy does not prevent this, but does facilitate eventual recovery.

My second reason for rejecting the Phoenix Knight is that he neglects the evidence from Muslim black Africa. This is the main burden of my paper. Before going into it in more detail, let us pause for a moment to consider the general possibilities of Christian/Muslim comparison in African studies. Horton appears to refer to the advocates of this style of analysis, dubbing them, somewhat inelegantly, 'comparative religionists'. He suspects them of preparing a takeover bid, but is himself already disillusioned with them, and regards their approach as a non-starter. Just whom he has in mind, however, is not clear. He mentions only one example, Turner's book on the Church of the Lord. Turner's prime aim is to determine whether this Aladura church can be properly called Christian, a theological exercise: comparison, except in this specific doctrinal sense, is largely absent. (There is a curious similarity here between Turner's anxiety about the definition of the true faith in any African setting, and Usuman dan Fodio's. Turner thought he could see the faith there, Usuman decided that he could not; but both men began with the same question).

Surely the case for comparison should not be so lightly set aside. That both Islam and Christianity have been deeply influenced by their African setting is almost a commonplace. Innumerable writers have commented on the ease with which Islam is accommodated to Africa: 'En Afrique, l'Islam n'a pas plus de coulcur que l'eau; c'est ce qui explique son succes: elle se colore aux teintes des terroirs et des pierres'. And the interest in separatist churches, where African Christians have, for the greater part, done most to acclimatise their faith, has quite eclipsed study of other forms of Christianity in Africa, whether orthodox mission-derived churches, or the newer pentecostal forms. A gallant effort has been made to compile a bibliography on the separatists: repeated appendices have been necessary, and the total of titles was already over 1,900 last year.

If this is correct, that both faiths have been influenced by Africa, then it is reasonable to assume that there must be certain common elements of influence, allowing direct comparison between Muslim experience and Christian. It would

be presumptuous indeed to think of Africa as a unity, and to expect to find much similarity between, say, the Muslim saint of western Saharan nomads, and the Christian prophet of the Zulu separatists. But there are, at the other extreme, areas where the two religions exist cheek by jowl among the same people, sharing very much the same circumstances. Buganda is a particularly clear example, Yorubaland another. Peel, making a careful study of two Aladura churches among the Yoruba, remarks: 'Except for Ahmadiyyah and the educational societies, the expansion of Islam is different from that of Christian mission'. This is, I think, to mistake the narrow organisational structure of mission, Muslim or Christian, for the much wider question of the expansion of a religion. The Ahmadiyyah organisation is like that of orthodox Christian missions from the west, because the Ahmadiyyah missionaries, from India and Pakistan, choose to model it thus and this is a historical problem interesting in its own right. But it is not the same as asking how and why Islam, whether Ahmadiyyah or orthodox, expands among the Yoruba: and I am sure that the exploration of these questions would help deepen our understanding of why other Yoruba become Christian, whether orthodox or Peel's special concern, Aladura, and how, having become Christian, they behave and believe. There are, also, wide prospects for the comparison of particular themes and topics, which may range more widely than this particular region or that conversion is one.

It is my belief not only that such a comparative approach may substantially help our understanding, but also that the academic tools for beginning the task are now sufficient. It would still be difficult, I suppose, for an armchair theologian to work out a detailed comparison from published sources: but a research worker, proposing to compare Islam and Christianity among, say the Yao or the Baganda, or in Lagos or, even, in Cape Town, would have an abundance of background and supporting material to work through before ever he or she set out for the field. Let us hope that such research workers will come forward to undertake the pioneer studies of direct comparison.

Turning now to the evidence from Muslim black Africa, with Christian comparisons still in mind, one of the most immediately striking contrasts involves the length of time which each religion has uninterruptedly been there. Leaving aside Ethiopia, there are many more places in black Africa which may boast of a continuous Muslim presence for a millennium, than there are places which have known Christianity for even a quarter of that time. This greatly enlarged time

scale allows us to pick out more clearly an underlying Muslim pattern, which may, very roughly, be characterised by three stages: quarantine, mixing, and reform. In the quarantine stage, the faith is represented by newcomers; traders, perhaps, from North Africa, or refugees, or clerics employed in providing religious services such as prayer and divination for their pagan patrons. Orthodoxy is relatively secure because there are no converters, and thus no one to bring into the Muslim community heterodox beliefs and observances drawn from his or her non-Muslim past. In most places, quarantine was not maintained indefinitely, and sooner or later, as local people converted in increasing numbers, the stage of mixing succeeded, in which people combined the profession of Islam, and as it might be the quite sincere observance of many Islamic tenets, with many pagan survivals.

Finally, often after a lapse of centuries, the candle of reform, kept alight by the written word and perhaps also by the devotion of some clerics who succeeded in maintaining an element of quarantine against the mixing all round them, burst into a conflagration and established the rule of the saints. The process did not start at the same time everywhere, nor advance everywhere at the same pace, so that examples of all three stages may be found in almost any period. Nor was progress uniform: should a great empire, such as Mali, or mixed Islam break up, its refugees might find themselves sheltering in pagan areas, and back in the quarantine stage: similarly, the white heat of reform often proved burdensome to maintain, and there was a tendency to slip back into mixing. Nevertheless, the basic underlying progression has been towards a purer faith.

Let us try to fit some evidence concerning conversion, both Muslim and Christian, into this threefold sequence. Quarantine is the least interesting, for by definition there are no large-scale conversions. Often the first converts had themselves to pass into the separate world of their new brothers-in-faith. The first Christians were outsiders: slaves in America, recaptives in Sierra Leone, or odd men outprised in some less abrupt way from their former status and society: the description in the novel *Things Fall Apart* is a classic statement. The evidence for a comparable stage in the planting of Islam is, so far as I know, slighter, but some intriguing possibilities may be mustered. That conversion was sometimes, perhaps often, a difficult step, likely to arouse scorn in traditional society, appears, for example, in the case of the Galla and of the Bambara, the former ridiculing Muslims as women water-carriers, back-rinsers, crying to

prayer like monkeys, the latter comparing the Muslim at prayer to a donkey grazing. Enslavement was an unusually efficient means of detaching individuals from their traditional society, and particularly when we recall the great extent of slavery within Muslim black Africa, it is possible to see this as an important preliminary to the conversion of individuals. Returning to the Yoruba people, it is interesting, and perhaps significant, that they regarded that phase of the Fulani jihad which led to the establishment of the Ilorin emirate as essentially a revolt of Muslim slaves against their Yoruba masters. This line of argument would suggest that the commonly remarked appeal of Islam in black Africa, as offering a new dignity and self-respect, is characteristic sometimes not of the first conversions, but of subsequent ones, when Islam has become in part established, just as Christianity, once it had a firm foothold, offered attractive opportunities. The initial development of the two religions thus becomes more a resemblance than a contrast.

Detachment, even of so rude a kind as enslavement, is rarely absolute, and the extent to which old habits and beliefs are carried over into the new life, even after such a searing experience, is sometimes surprising. John Peterson has written in some detail of this among the recaptives, mostly Christian, in Sierra Leone. A similar tendency may be documented, over a much longer period, among slaves going north across the Sahara, in the Muslim context. The bori, or spirits of traditional Hausa belief, were carried with the slave caravans to Ghadames, and elsewhere in North Africa, often flourishing in their new environment. Tremeame, preparing one of the earliest studies of these Hausa cults, found the material for his book in Tunisia. There is a wealth of information, as well, illustrating similar survivals in the West Indies and in Brazil. Such carryover is partial vindication of the Phoenix Knight: but notice that, among these people whose transference from microcosm to macrocosm has been particularly dramatic, it is the spirit cults, rather than awareness of the one God, that flourishes.

Once the quarantine barriers are down, and people begin voluntarily to convert to the new religion, the dangers (from an orthodox point of view) of mixing are correspondingly enlarged. On the whole, Islam has been much more vulnerable to this in black Africa than has Christianity: we can see this, for example, in the relative ease of admission to the two faiths, on the Christian side an often lengthy catechumenate, perhaps a literacy requirement, probationary periods, and so on, while for Islam the mere profession of faith is usually sufficient as

a beginning. Might comparative study be helpful here between the mixed Islam of black Africa, and the religious situation in the ancient world about the time of the rise of Christianity? My guide is A.D. Nock's *Conversion*, first published in 1933. Nock contrasts 'the system of religious observances of a small social unit with elementary needs and interests and no important contacts with other [superior] cultures' with 'the religion of a prophetic movement in the first ardour of the founder'.

In the first there is no religious frontier to cross, no difficult decision to make between two views of life which make its every detail different; in the other the individual stands before a choice which means either the renunciation of his past and entry into a kingdom ... or the refusal of this dream as chimerical.

Between these extremes Nock finds a middle ground in which religion develops in step with political advance and cultural exchange. The more favourably placed non-prophetic religions grew and, particularly when people were able to move about, they met conquest, trade, intermarriage, military service, even slavery, helped in this: Nock reminds us that Naaman heard of Jehovah through his Hebrew handmaid, just as a Yoruba potentate might have learnt of the God of the Muslims through his Fulani slave. Such meeting did not, among the non-prophetic religions, lead to individuals making a decisive switch of allegiance. Instead, people stood with one foot on either side of the fence, adopting the new worships as useful supplements. This Nock calls *adhesion*. He contrasts it with *conversion*, the 'deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right'.

It is possible to see in Nock's *adhesion* the sort of loyalty which many African traditional religions evoked; and in his *conversion*, particularly the 'turning from indifference', sometimes akin to reformed Islam. What is peculiar to the situation in tropical Africa is that, while Islam is a prophetic religion, theoretically demanding conversion, it is very often regarded in practice, in its mixed form in Africa, as a non-prophetic one, for which *adhesion* is entirely adequate.

During the long twilight of mixing, various factors were of great importance in preserving at least a watered-down Muslim presence: rules and characteristics which marked off the Muslim community (prayer, dress, food, and so on); the remarkable mobility of men, and ideas, within the Muslim world, knitting together the furthest frontiers and the heartlands; the special prestige and powers

of clerics, the cities of refuge of clerical rule (of which Timbuktu was the most outstanding), the rights of sanctuary; opportunities for education; and others. Education was particularly important, not only as a lifeline of orthodoxy during mixing periods, but also as a chief weapon of the reformers, for it would be a view far too narrow, to take Usman dan Fodio and others as merely interested in the military, and not the scholastic, arm. In education, too, there are considerable opportunities for comparison. The bush school of the Christian mission, and the Quran school round the bonfire, each has been the subject of description and study, but the two have not yet, so far as I know, been placed side by side, save briefly in Noel King's personal, enlivening little book, *Christian and Muslim in Africa*. Not only in educational methods, but in many other respects, for instance in their role as initiation schools within the village community, bush and Quran schools are comparable. A good deal of attention has been given to the revolutionary potential, in areas like Africa, of modern education, as in this observation by Margaret Mead:

Primitive education was a process by which continuity was maintained between parents and children ... Modern education includes a heavy emphasis upon the function of education to create discontinuities - to turn the child ... of the illiterate into the literate.

No doubt, there is much truth in this, with the Quran school on the primitive side of the fence, and the mission school on the modern. But it would be rash, as, for example, John Taylor has pointed out for Uganda, to underrate the importance of the village Christian school in integrating village society, or, on the other hand, the radically subversive character of Muslim teaching if the teachers' union is infiltrated by reformers, while the society remains wedded to mixed Islam, as was the case in Hausaland before Usman dan Fodio launched his jihad.

Behind the details of education lies the more fundamental problem, already the subject of considerable study, of literacy and its effects. One possible line of analysis emphasises the tendency of literacy, on being introduced, to a formerly non-literate society, to freeze beliefs, and to insulate them from social change. Peel and Horton illustrate this by contrasting the attitudes of two Aladura churches, the Cherubim and Seraphim on the one hand and the Christ Apostolic Church on the other towards medicine. Both churches arose during a time of epidemics, when confidence in medicine was at a low ebb, and stress on faith-healing a natural alternative. Since then, the Cherubim and Seraphim, relying

more on God's unwritten words mediated through present day prophets, has been able to move with the times, allowing some play to western and traditional medicine, while the Christ Apostolic Church, tied by pastors expounding the written word, remains with its face resolutely fixed against all medicine.

At the same time, it is clear that within the Christian context, literacy can release revolutionary energies, even within the church, as people, for example, come to read the Bible for themselves, and find therein much that was not prominent in the missionaries' teaching. Barrett stresses the publication of the scriptures in the vernacular as a crucial step towards separatism; I am sure he is right about the effect of the scripture, but less confident about the significance of vernacular translation. Many separatist leaders have worked effectively from the Bible in a foreign language.

In fact, although the contrast in practical effect is clear, between literacy conserving the status quo in belief and behaviour, and literacy introducing radical changes, the basic attitude of reverence for the written word is the same in both cases. If the written prescript has continued in use, the result of such reverence is conservative; but if the precept has fallen into disuse, and an appeal to literature revives it, the result may be revolutionary.

The same duality of impact is found in the case of the Quran, and other Muslim religious literature. Some beliefs and attitudes are frozen, and only with great difficulty can be thawed out and poured into the new moulds of the modern world: two good examples are the attitude towards Christians, as dhimmis, protected persons, second-class citizens, and the attitude towards slavery, a divinely ordained institution, repeatedly sanctioned in the Quran. But at the same time, the written word preserves the proper standards of the faith, so that these may be recalled even after generations of acclimatisation to the tropical African setting, and of general slackness. There has probably been no other single document of greater significance in the history of West Africa than the answers of the cleric al-Maghili, to the questions set for him by the usurping emperor of Songhay, the askiya, Muhammad I. Written about 1500, to justify revolution, the answers argued that jihad against mixing Muslims was more urgent even than the struggle against outright pagans; taken up again about 1800, the answers were once more employed as apologia for revolution, and continued to serve this purpose for some time, and in several areas.

How far do these effects of literacy correspond with those most suggestively

indicated by Goody and Watt, who attempt generalisation drawn mainly from ancient Greece? There are some striking similarities, and some equally striking contrasts: in fact, we have a kind of mirror image, where Greek literacy condemned the past to favour the present Muslim literacy in black Africa condemned the present to renew the past. Goody and Watt argue that literary societies set the past more apart from the present: writing down some of the main elements in the cultural tradition brought about an awareness of two things: of the past as different from the present and of the inherent inconsistencies in the picture of life as it was inherited by the individual from the cultural tradition in its recorded form.

This fits excellently with Muslim black Africa: Usman dan Fodio was acutely conscious of the difference between the past, especially the romantic golden age of the rightly guided caliphs, and the present of corrupt Hausa courts, and of the inherent inconsistencies between the pure Islam as recorded and the mixed Islam as practised. Again, Goody and Watt speak of the association between widespread literacy and 'the notion of the world of knowledge as transcending political units'. Such an association has been of critical importance for reforming Muslims; though they would not speak of the world of knowledge so much as of the authority of God and His law.

Theoretically, if we accept the argument of Goody and Watt, Islamic literacy should allow historical inquiry, leading, in their words, to 'scepticism, not only about the legendary past, but about received ideas about the universe as a whole'. Individuals are impelled to a much more conscious, comparative and critical, attitude to the accepted world picture, and notably to the notions of God, the universe and the past. These particular aspects of the Greek experience are notoriously lacking in black Muslim Africa: the reformers simply rejected the mixed Islam of their contemporary situation, and adopted a generally very conservative, uncritical attitude towards the records of the Muslim past: it was the present, not the past, that suffered. Precedent was all; sceptical was the last word you would think of applying to the outlook of these scholars.

In another article, Goody attempts to explain why literacy had one effect in Greece, and so different a result in the western Sudan. He suggests that this was because literacy in the western Sudan was religious, dominated by the Holy Book, which almost invariably meant a foreign language.

But the main factor in restricting the developments in the cognitive sphere

was the association of the book with magic and religion, an exclusive, all embracing cult that claimed it had the single road to truth. It is above all the predominantly religious character of literacy that, here as elsewhere, prevented the medium from fulfilling its promise.

This conclusion follows an extended discussion of the magical uses of literacy, in talisms, slate water, and so forth; that is to say, of a style of Islam proportionately far more important in the mixing than in the reform stage. It seems an unnecessarily gloomy conclusion. In a remote area such as Sudanic Africa, at the far end of precarious trade routes, on no crossroads such as the eastern Mediterranean, the first priority for Muslims was a holding operation. The danger was that valuable cultural innovations might be lost: this was a real threat for Islam itself, should mixing get out of hand, and there are well-documented cases of reversion to paganism. Literacy was an essential safeguard for Islam in the area. Goody laments that the 'explosive potentialities' of literacy had consequences so much 'less radical' here than elsewhere: but we might equally argue that Islamic reform was both radical and explosive, in the traditional Sudanic setting.

In Muslim black Africa, literacy has served as a time bomb of reform, sometimes with a fuse smouldering if need be over centuries, but with the powder of the main charge kept dry meanwhile none the less. When the time comes for the explosion, this too is a form of conversion, for the concept applies to two distinct crises of religious development: exchanging one faith (or none) for another, and exchanging indifference and dilution for fervency within the same faith. This second meaning of conversion is clear in the western tradition, and Nock has vividly summed it up: this type of experience is very well known. We must not, however, expect to find exact analogies for it beyond the range of countries with long-standing Christian tradition, for in them even when the fact of conversion appears wholly sudden and not led up to by a gradual process of gaining conviction, even when the convert may in all good faith profess that the beliefs which have won his sudden assent are new to him, there is a background of concepts to which a stimulus can give life. When John Wesley preached to the miners in Kingswood few of them can have been obsessed by a sense of sin or filled with a desire for supernatural grace, and yet those ideas were somewhere under the level of consciousness as a heritage from generation after generation of Bible-reading and sermon-hearing forefathers. Such conversion is in its essence

a turning away from a sense of present wrongness at least as much as a turning towards a positive ideal.

There is no need to confine this to the Christian tradition, for it is clear enough too in Muslim black Africa, in the transition from mixed to reformed Islam. The people to whom the message of the reforming Muslims was addressed were, probably more often than not, people who had some awareness of Islam and who would if asked even before the reform movement began, probably have held themselves to be Muslims. The fact that Horton's argument is bound almost exclusively to the first sense only of conversion means that the essential, underlying movement of religious growth, through the first confession towards the second, is not the reformed Islam which was imposed, alike upon the newly converted, the reconverted and the recalcitrant, was based upon the literary monuments of the Muslim heritage. It involved, sometimes, a sharp and even cruel insistence upon proper standards, and an equally sharp break with local traditions. No one who has read of the stern law-enforcement of the theocracies; for example, the eye-witness accounts of fatal flogging in Bomum for violations of Ramadan, early in the nineteenth century, will ever think of that kind of Islam as coloured no more than water. It was dyed with blood.

The fact that reform was often imposed by military action served further to advance conversion, for conquest is a powerful solvent of traditional beliefs, leaving men's minds more open to new doctrine. Here again are opportunities for comparison, between the jihads and the imposition of European colonialism. That European colonialism was rarely undertaken for specifically religious reasons, while the jihads generally were, does not greatly affect the comparison, for the missions often arrived at about the same time as the occupation and were well placed to take advantage of the dislocation to traditional religion.

If we set the extended Muslim timescale alongside the shorter Christian one, it is clear that the stage which has suffered most under the Christian dispensation is that of mixed religion. Missions, on the whole, have been anxious to see that purity of orthodoxy which they first brought in quarantine, safely preserved as it were in a permanent reform stage, and have tried to squeeze out the mixing stage. Human nature rejecting such a rapid transformation, the churches have thrown off, in Horton's words, 'a shower of doctrinally dissenting breakaway sects'; we may say, with Long John Silver, 'and all for this same hurry and hurry and hurry'. Thus the mixing stage, as far as Christianity is concerned, is reconstituted, in

the form of the separatist, alongside the more orthodox churches. The essential Christianity of many separatists appears more clearly today than does the essential Islam of many pre-jihad mixers, but this may be in part the result of the biases of our observers; modern scholars being often favourably disposed towards the Christian separatists, while earlier Muslim writers, apologists for jihad, brimmed with zeal against the mixers.

I have deliberately refrained from using the word syncretism, instead of mixing, for the former seems to me to suggest rather more of a formulated, conscious combination of religions than was the case at least among most Muslim mixers. Some interesting suggestions, however, about the phenomenon of syncretism in general have recently been made, and it may well be that my stage of mixed religion needs to be rethought against this wider backdrop. Pannenberg, indeed, goes so far as to suggest that it is questionable whether the purity of a single religious tradition is worth striving for, and mixture reprehensible: when a religious tradition combines with others, if it maintains itself as the dominant factor, it can express its assimilative and integrative power, while purity can mean sterility. In the contrast between the Muslim missionary and the Christian, in so far as a willingness to entrust responsibility for defending the faith into the hands of the ignorant and newly converted i.e., the potential mixers, is concerned, I have often thought that the Muslim has shown greater practical trust in the power of God to guide His believers. This guidance I have always understood in terms of an eventual reform stage, i.e., the restoration of the purity (perhaps considerably reinterpreted) of the original faith. This may have been a misjudgment: perhaps it is in the mixing itself that guidance most clearly appears. I am not, however, entirely won over: Pannenberg's very open and tolerant position, centred upon his interpretation of Christianity as correspondingly open, does not seem adequately to take the measure of Islam, where quite different and much more exclusive emphases are dominant.

Having concluded this brief sketch of Muslim conversion, let us return to Horton, to see exactly what he does say about the Islam which he has paired with Christianity. First of all, the study of religion in Africa is, according to him, 'still very much the preserve of the social anthropologists'. Is this so for Islam there? There have been many and notable contributions from social anthropologists, Abner Cohen's recent *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa* is an outstanding example. But there is also an extensive contribution by historians, another

impressive range of studies by linguists, together with works of theologians and other smaller groups. It is through these that we can now explore black African Islam in such historical depth. Looking over this millennium of history, I am puzzled to know what Horton has in mind when he speaks of Islam, operating by itself, as producing 'very meagre results'. Surely a wave of revolutions engulfing the whole of the interior of West Africa, from the lower Senegal to Lake Chad, a wave which receding left imamates, emirates, caliphates, unified realms where, often, none had existed before, cannot whether good or bad, be termed a meagre result. Perhaps we are to understand that 'other factors of the modern situation', such as trade and the nation state, have been added to the mix, and that these explain the dramatic change. But what might these factors be? Hausaland, for example, was no stranger to commerce before 1800, and while some resemblance may be traced between the Sokoto caliphate which Usman dan Fodio established there, and a nation state, we can scarcely use the state to explain the religion, when the religion has, with fire and sword, created the state. To say that Islam 'does not nag excessively at those who lie towards the pagan end of the continuum' (of its adherents) is again to suggest that the whole reform period has been overlooked. Only on his last page does Horton mention Muslim reform, speaking of jihads mounted by 'Muslims ... from north of the Sahara', and the contemporary, less military, purifying zeal of foreign bearers of Islam. This is largely unhistorical: with a few outstanding exceptions most of the great reformers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had never even visited north of the Sahara, much less come from there originally.

The Phoenix Knight, in order to preserve uncontaminated the genius of African traditional religion, has had to bypass the extraordinary achievements of black African Muslims. And, in neglecting these, he fails to see the underlying current of events also in African Christianity, where the work in hand is not a salvage job on remnants of Eden, but an African Jacob wrestling with the angel of God of the Christian dispensation.

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ON THE RATIONALITY OF CONVERSION PART I

By Robin Horton

Introduction

In a recent article in this journal I sketched the outline of a theory which I suggested might help us to make sense of a large but puzzling accumulation of data relating to the 'conversion' of African peoples to Islam and Christianity. The theory evoked a vigorous critical response, also in this journal, from the Islamist Humphrey Fisher. In the present paper I shall reply to Fisher's criticism. In the process, I hope to show that the theory can be used to make sense of a range of data not carefully considered in my previous article.

Before getting down to a detailed treatment of Fisher's objections, let me restate briefly the ideas that evoked them. I start with the idea of a 'basic' African cosmology which has a two-tier structure, the first tier being that of the lesser spirits and the second that of the supreme being. The lesser spirits underpin events and processes in the microcosm of the local community and its environment, whilst the supreme being underpins events and process in the macrocosm i.e., in the world as a whole. As the microcosm forms part of the macrocosm, so the lesser spirits are thought of, either as manifestations of the supreme being, or as entities ultimately deriving their power from him. Where the way of life is dominated by subsistence farming and commerce is poorly developed, the social relations of the people of a particular area are likely to be largely confined by the boundaries of their microcosm. They will be aware of the wider world; but they will be aware of it as an arena which does not directly concern them. Given the assumptions of the 'basic' cosmology about the respective spheres of concern of lesser spirits and supreme being, it follows that this sort of situation is likely to favour a religious life in which a great deal of attention is paid to the lesser spirits (underpinners of the microcosm), whilst very little attention is paid to the supreme being (underpinner of the macrocosm). However, where there is a development of factors making for wider communication (for instance, a development of long-distance trade), the social life of those involved will no longer be so strongly confined by the boundaries of their microcosm. Many of their relationships, indeed, will cut dramatically across these boundaries. In this situation, given the same 'basic' cosmology, religious life is likely to take a somewhat different form. Less attention will be paid to the spirits, and more to the supreme being.

This scheme, I go on to argue, provides us with the basis for understanding, in any given case, the outcome of exposure to Islam and/or Christianity. In the first situation, where microcosmic boundaries are still strong and where attention to the lesser spirits consequently overshadows attention paid to the supreme being, such exposure is unlikely to be followed by any dramatic changes. In the second situation, where microcosmic boundaries are weakening, and where many people are consequently groping toward a more elaborate definition of the supreme being and a more developed cult of this being, exposure is likely to have more positive sequels. Even in this second situation, however, acceptance of Islamic or Christian patterns will be highly selective. Just what is accepted and what rejected will be largely determined by the structure of the 'basic' cosmology, and by the limits which this structure imposes on the cosmology's potential for response to social change. It is this view of the reaction to Islam and Christianity which leads me to talk of them as catalysts for changes that were 'in the air' anyway. For the sake of brevity, I shall refer to this set of ideas as the Intellectualist Theory. However, I hope that the more bigoted type of sociologist will note that it is also very much a sociological theory.

Miscellaneous Criticisms

In what follows I shall start by dealing with those of Fisher's criticisms which require short, sharp, and essentially destructive answers. Having cleared them out of that way, I shall go on to deal with two points that require longer and more constructive responses.

Fisher criticises me, in the first instance, for holding that 'what may appear, for example, as Muslim or Christian in Africa today is in reality the development of that which was inherent in the traditional faiths'. This proposition he finds so odd that he feels compelled to move straight on to an examination of my motives for advancing it, and to do so even before getting down to consider the question of evidence. He diagnoses a sentimental, over-romantic attitude to the traditional cultures. He also goes on to warn of the political implications of such romanticism, suggesting that it encourages, amongst other things, the extinction of parliamentary democracy and the growth of tyranny.

Now I agree with Fisher on the necessity for ideological diagnosis in the appraisal of interpretations of African religious life. For this is an area of study in which the buzzing of bees in scholarly bonnets can be deafening, and in which

everyone involved should be prepared to act as a bee-detector. I also hold that indignant denial, however sincere, is no way to refute an ideological diagnosis: for bees in the bonnet, like body odour, are not often perceptible to the owner. The diagnoser, however, must show that his assertions are not grossly inconsistent with parts of his victim's work other than that which happens to have attracted his attention. And on this count Fisher's diagnosis is way off mark. One look at other things I have written in this area will show that, if I have any bees in my bonnet, they are much the same anti-sentimentalist, anti-romantic, libertarian bees as Fisher seems to carry around in his. (Though perhaps they don't buzz so loud!)

In any case, what is so very odd about the proposition to which Fisher objects? First of all, it is surely a cardinal principle of modern historiography that one does not treat any human group as a *tabula rasa* automatically registering the imprint of external cultural influences. Rather, one treats it as the locus of thought-patterns and values that determine rather closely which of these influences will be accepted and which rejected. To anyone who agrees with this, my proposition must seem a good deal less odd than it does to Fisher. Secondly, the pattern of facts that we have before us in this instance is in itself a very peculiar one. Given the same Muslim or Christian stimulus, some people remain unmoved whilst others respond. And amongst those that respond, many do so by throwing up forms of religious life that bear the most tenuous relation to the forms presented in the original stimulus. Here, it stares one in the face that the crucial variables are not the external influences (Islam, Christianity), but the pre-existing thought-patterns and values, and the pre-existing socio-economic matrix. Anyone who cannot see this needs his bonnet examined!

Fisher also criticises the assumption, implicit in my approach, that the traditional religions had a potential for radical and enduring change before the advent of the world religions and of literacy. In these circumstances, he says, significant changes 'seem rarely to have got permanently off the ground'. Indeed, far from the responses to Islam and Christianity having been 'in the air' anyway, it was only with the advent of these two religions that such changes became possible at all. In other words, the indigenous religions were essentially static, and it took Islam and Christianity to infuse some degree of dynamism into the religious scene.

This last proposition is very odd indeed. What evidence can Fisher possibly have for it? It is perfectly true that many African peoples see their cosmologies

as having a timeless, absolute status; but this is no ground at all for concluding that such cosmologies really are frozen for all eternity. Again, it is perfectly true that, for most of the indigenous cosmologies, we have very little direct evidence concerning their past history. But although this means we have little direct evidence that they are the products of radical and enduring change, it also means we have little direct evidence that they have remained static over a long period. When it comes to indirect evidence, moreover, we have more positive indications. Thus linguistic evidence indicates pretty clearly that whole clusters of present-day societies have come into being through the expansion, fission, and dispersal of single ancestral groups. This is probably true, for instance, of the Mande, and Bantu-speaking peoples. Now in each of such clusters at the present day we find a considerable variety of religious systems; and in each member of a given cluster we find the religious system closely articulated with the social and environmental setting in which it flourishes. Given the evidence as to origins, the religious variety shown by each cluster can only be interpreted as the result of divergences from an original unity, divergences arising from adaptations to differing social and environmental circumstances. Whatever the dearth of direct evidence, then, indirect evidence points quite strongly to change rather than static as the salient feature of the pre-Islamic, pre-Christian religious scene.

Yet another of Fisher's criticisms is to the effect that dissolution of microcosmic boundaries, whether in the presence or in the absence of stimulus from Islam and Christianity, often results in changes quite other than development of the concept and cult of the supreme being. As an instance of such changes, he cites the growth of witch-finding movements. To this, I would reply that nowhere in my original paper did I suggest that increased attention to the supreme being was likely to be the only effect of the weakening of micro-cosmic boundaries. There may well, for all I know, be other effects such as an increase in witchcraft accusations and a development of witch-finding cults. What I do maintain, and I don't think Fisher has yet produced the evidence to refute me here, is that where microcosmic boundaries are weakened, whatever the other consequences, increased attention to the supreme being is likely to be there as well.

The last criticism which I shall try to dispatch in a summary manner concerns my derogatory reference to 'Comparative Religionists'. Here, I think, we are talking at cross-purposes. Fisher assumes that I am criticising 'Comparative Religionists' for making comparisons between religions e.g., between Islam and

Christianity. In fact, I have no objection to such comparisons, having made them myself in my original paper and being about to do so again in the present paper. I do have strong objections to the methodological and theoretical assumptions of 'Comparative Religionists', but these have nothing to do with their determination to be comparative. As to what these objections are, I shall say more at the end of this paper. So much for those of Fisher's criticisms that can be disposed of briefly and destructively. Now for the two criticisms that require a more positive approach, the first of these is that the Intellectualist Theory fails to account for the way in which the position of the supreme being varies as between one indigenous religious system and another. The second is that the Theory does not account for the results of African exposure to Islam. In my original paper, which was primarily concerned with 'conversion' to Christianity, I gave rather inadequate attention to these topics. In what follows, I hope to show that the Intellectualist Theory can increase our insight into both.

The Supreme Being in the Indignous Religions

Even in areas of Africa with little or no exposure to Muslim or Christian influence, attention paid to the supreme being is by no means uniformly minimal. The conventional stereotype of the African *deus otiosus* is certainly to be found in a great many pre-Islamic, pre-Christian cultures. But a much more developed cult of the supreme being is to be found in a great many others. Now on my premises, the *deus otiosus* should be found where microcosmic boundaries are strong and confining, and the more developed doctrine and cult of the supreme being should be found where many social relationships ignore these boundaries. Fisher, however, suggests that this is not in fact the case. According to him: 'God appears when he ought to lurk in the wings, and loiters when he should be gaining in importance'. In the present state of our knowledge, I am not certain that this point of contention can be fully resolved. There are three major difficulties in our way. First of all, many monographs that give an adequate account of social organisation give an inadequate account of religious life, whilst others that give a rather full account of religion tell us little about social organisation.

Secondly, we meet grave difficulties when we try to discover how far present-day belief and cult relating to the supreme being are part of the indigenous religious heritage, and how far they are the results of Islamic and/or Christian religious influence. Ironically, much of the trouble here stems from a fact

which lends support to the Intellectualist Theory: the fact that African peoples characteristically see Islamic and Christian ideas of God as referring to their own supreme being, and draw freely on such ideas in the process of elaborating their conception of this being. It may even be true that, the more the initial attention paid to the supreme being, the more use subsequently made of Islamic and/or Christian belief and cult, and hence the more the difficulties for the scholar trying to get some idea of the initial situation. In most cases, of course, one can in practice see certain elements that are clearly indigenous, and certain elements that are as clearly Islamic or Christian. But there remains a very considerable middle ground where one cannot be at all sure.

Thirdly, the whole topic of the position of the supreme being in indigenous belief and cult is so loaded with emotion that it is sometimes difficult to know where fact ends and wishful thinking begins. African scholars who are committed Christians seem particularly obsessed with the need to show that, all over the continent, there is an indigenous concept of the supreme being which is continuous in its essentials with the Christian concept. Those who question the wisdom of such scholars in deciding the issue in advance of the evidence are accused of trying to belittle the indigenous religions. And if they are Westerners they are accused of worse!

With obstacles such as these in the way, it is little wonder that a thorough sociological-cum-phenomenological study of the idea of a supreme being in the indigenous religious traditions remains a project for the future. Indeed, it would perhaps be surprising if such a project ever got underway.

However, if the means of getting a clear-cut decision on the issue between Fisher and myself are just not to hand, there are none the less some pointers, some straws in the wind. Thus if we turn our attention to the handful of cultures for which there are good descriptions both of social organisation and of religion, the indications seem, by and large, to support the Intellectualist Theory. Let us start by saying boo to the 'God has shown himself to everyone' brigade, and by accepting that as much objectivity and good faith are shown by those who describe certain peoples as showing nil or minimal interest in a supreme being, as by those who describe other peoples as paying a great deal of attention to such a being.

If we take this attitude and press on regardless, we find a whole spectrum of cosmologies, ranging from those which include almost nothing in the way of reference to a supreme being, to those which are almost dominated by the

concept and cult of this being. A few peoples have been reported as having no concept of a supreme being. The most circumstantial of such reports is Wilson's on the Nyakyusa of East Africa. Nyakyusa, significantly, are subsistence farmers whose social relations are confined almost entirely within the bounds of their local microcosm.

A whole list of peoples are reported as having a religious life largely concentrated upon the lesser spirits, with minimal development of the concept of a supreme being, and only the most infrequent approaches to him. Lodagaa, Tallensi, Tiv, Ndembu, and Lugbara come to mind in this context. Once again, all are primarily subsistence farmers, and their social relations are confined rather strongly by their microcosmic boundaries. From the point of view of the Intellectualist Theory, so far, so good.

Many more peoples than is commonly realised occupy a middle position; their religious life still primarily focused on the lesser spirits, but with a more elaborate concept of the supreme being, and with more frequent approaches to this being. Examples are the Ibo, Ijo, Fon, Ashanti, Edo, and Yoruba of West Africa, and the Shona of East Africa. What most if not all of these peoples have in common is an economy in which farming (and, in the case of the Ijo, fishing) within more or less fixed territories is supplemented by considerable trade beyond the boundaries of these territories. Here again, the situation seems to be much as the Intellectualist Theory would predict. For, given the premises of the Theory, the balance between relations which are confined within microcosmic boundaries (i.e. those involved in farming) and relations which transcend these boundaries (i.e. those involved in trade) must encourage a religious life in which a good deal of attention is paid, not only to the lesser spirits, but also to the supreme being.

One difference is worth noting within this set of examples. Amongst some peoples such as Ibo and Ijo, the cult of the supreme being is practiced with equal enthusiasm by all adult members of society. Amongst others, such as Fon, Ashanti, Edo, Yoruba, and Shona, the cult, although it may be practiced by ordinary people, attains its greatest importance and elaboration in the hands of the rulers. This too is what the Theory would lead us to expect. For in the less centralised societies such as those of Ibo and Ijo, most adult members of the population not only farm but engage in trade. Hence there are no great differences in degree of involvement with the wider world, and no corresponding

religious differences. In the more centralised polities, however, ordinary people do the bulk of the farming, and are more confined by the boundaries of their local microcosms. Chiefs and royalty, on the other hand, are more involved, directly or indirectly, with matters like long-distance trade and interstate diplomacy which imply relations that transcend such boundaries. Here, then, there are considerable differences in degree of involvement with the wider world, and correspondingly large differences in religious life.

At the far end of our spectrum, we have a set of peoples who pay considerable attention to the lesser spirits, but in whose religious life the supreme being nonetheless looms very large indeed. Prominent amongst such peoples are the Nuer and Dinka pastoralists of the southern Sudan, the Pygmies of the Ituri Forest, and the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert.

In this set, let us look first at the Nuer and the Dinka. Fisher hails them as cases in which God has appeared when he should be lurking in the wings. Thinking casually, one might be inclined to agree with him; for here, surely, are two more lots of subsistence farmers, whose religious life ought, according to the Theory, to give very little place to the concept and cult of the supreme being. A close look, however, reveals that the situation is by no means as simple as this. For the Nuer and Dinka farming is first and foremost cattle herding; and it involves a pattern of transhumance seldom paralleled amongst the tillers of the soil. In the course of this transhumance, the individual cattle herder not only leaves the microcosm physically to wander in the world outside. He also forms many relationships, which breach its boundaries socially. Thus, for part of the year, he lives with fellow members of the lineage-cluster which forms his primary point of reference, and which may be said to constitute his microcosm. Yet at other times of the year he finds himself living in other places, often with people from lineages other than his own. He may even change his primary point of reference several times during his life. Hence, over the years, he is not only constantly breaking out of his microcosm and returning, he is also, albeit more rarely, exchanging one microcosm for another. This is the sort of situation in which, on the basis of the Intellectualist Theory, one would expect the cult of the supreme being to be important.

With Pygmy and Bushman hunters, we have an emphasis on the supreme being which exceeds even that found among the Nuer and Dinka. But what was the case with the cattle herders is even more the case with the hunters. For not only do

the hunting bands of those peoples rove about a good deal. Their composition is constantly changing as individuals depart at will to join other bands or come in at will from elsewhere. Here microcosmic boundaries, either territorial or social, are very weak. So once again, this is the sort of situation in which the Intellectualist Theory would predict a strong emphasis on the supreme being.

So far, then, the evidence seems to corroborate the Intellectualist Theory. Admittedly, what I have just given could be described by the unkind as an impressionistic sight-seeing trip. Certainly, it is no substitute for an exhaustive and statistically sophisticated cross-cultural survey. But, as I said earlier, the latter remains a project for the future. Meanwhile, such cross-cultural evidence as we do have is complemented by some impressive pieces of intra-cultural evidence.

A starting point here is provided by Jack Goody's recent book on the religious life of the Lodagaa of northern Ghana. Goody stresses the dynamic character of the balance between lesser spirits and supreme being in Lodagaa cosmology. For most people in this culture, the supreme being is a remote figure with whom they have no direct dealings. But there are signs that, even in the absence of intervention from agents of the world religions, this attitude can easily change. As examples of such signs Goody cites the cult of 'Little God' (God's manifestation on earth?) which swept Lodagaa country in the nineteen-fifties, and the far reaching speculation about the position of God in the cosmos which is to be found in the myth of the Bagre society. He suggests that such ripeness for change is a feature of many other West African cosmologies.

Unfortunately for present purposes, Goody makes no suggestions as to the social context of increasing Lodagaa attention to the supreme being. But one can hardly help recalling that the period he refers to is one in which Lodagaa were being dragged slowly but surely into the wider society of modern Ghana. In any case, the virtue of his remarks on this topic is that they stimulate us to look around for other examples of the same process. And in such other examples as I have been able to turn up, the link between social and ideational change is clear.

Perhaps the most impressive example of this kind is provided by the Ibo peoples of south-eastern Nigeria. The central Ibo, though lacking in state political institutions, have long supplemented farming with a fair amount of inter-communal trade; and it is not surprising that in their indigenous religious traditions, cults of the lesser spirits are supplemented by a cult of the supreme being. Nonetheless, over most of Iboland, it is the lesser spirits that have taken

up the greater part of people's religious energies. About three hundred years ago, however, a strikingly different situation began to develop in the south-east corner of the area. The Aro, members of a modestly sized village-group, became more and more deeply involved in the long-distance commerce stimulated by the Atlantic slave dealers, and eventually succeeded in establishing a trading network whose tentacles extended, not only through much of Iboland itself, but also through parts of the neighbouring Ibibio, Ekoi, and Ijo countries. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the Aro, though they still looked to their ancestral village-group as their home base, had established colonies all over the area penetrated by this network. Over the years, moreover, their commercial prestige took on political overtones. As agents of a lucrative trade in slaves and other commodities, they had free passage throughout the area, even when there were serious quarrels between communities along their routes. Hence people who wished to travel far from their home villages came to look upon them as the natural providers of safe conduct. Again, their position made them ideal arbitrators in disputes between different autonomous communities. And they grew so confident in this role that sometimes, where their verdict was ignored, they called on the Abam, a related group who were not averse to hiring themselves out as mercenary warriors, to come and punish the offenders by sacking their villages and seizing them as slaves. In short, though themselves lacking developed state institutions, the Aro created a network of communications and a sphere of relative peace and order that covered a very large area of what is now the south-eastern corner of Nigeria.

Inseparable from these commercial and political developments were others of a religious nature. Most notable was the development of a cult of the supreme being far more elaborate than anything to be found elsewhere in Iboland. The centre of the cult was the great oracle-shrine at the home base of Aro-Chukwu. Here came people from all over Iboland and beyond, seeking resolution of their disputes or answers to questions about their fortunes. Here too came all those who had been instructed by diviners to make major offerings to the supreme being. The Aro claimed that their commercial and political prowess was directly underpinned by the supreme being; and the mass of Ibo and Ibibio villagers came to accept this claim. To ordinary people they were Umu Chukwu 'Children of God'.

The setting of these remarkable developments was one from which both Muslim and Christian influences were completely absent. Yet in them, we can see a beautifully unambiguous link between the breaking down of the boundaries

dividing innumerable local microcosms and the dramatic elaboration of the cult of the supreme being.

A second example is provided by Lienhardt in his book on the religion of the Dinka. In Dinkaland generally, as we have seen, the cult of the supreme being is of considerable importance. From time to time, however, there arise situations in which the cult becomes not merely important but central. Such situations are created by prophetic leaders, who bring together numerous mutually antagonistic groups, and who establish peace and order over huge areas where they did not obtain before. One of the greatest of these leaders was a man called Arianhdit, who proclaimed his mission around 1918, and who established an area of influence which stretched way beyond the confines of Dinkaland. Although misunderstandings eventually led to conflict between Arianhdit's followers and the colonial government, he is said to have approved of the latter's efforts to set up better communications and a wider sphere of orderly social life, and to have prophesied that these efforts would culminate in the development of a great nation state in which all would enjoy peace. True to the premises of a cosmology in which all events that clearly transcend the boundaries of local groups are thought to be the direct work of the supreme being, Dinka saw both Arianhdit and the early colonial government as manifestations of divine activity. Arianhdit himself claimed to be possessed by the supreme being, and the latter's cult was central in the religious life of his followers.

Here, we cannot be so completely sure about the absence of Muslim and Christian influences as we could in the case of the Aro. Dinka were certainly aware of the activities of the Mahdi. In earlier times they must have been at least dimly aware of the existence of the great Christian kingdom of Nubia to the north of them. And at about the time of Arianhdit's emergence, the first Christian missions were coming into the area. Nonetheless, it would appear from Lienhardt's exposition that, by the time of these developments, Dinka had had little or no effective contact with the agents of either of the two world religions, and that Arianhdit's movement was essentially indigenous in its inspiration. Once again, then, we seem to be confronted, in circumstances in which the influence of the world religions can be discounted, with an unambiguous link between dissolution of microcosmic boundaries and increased attention to the supreme being.

A third example is taken from Gwassa's recent account of the Maji Maji revolt. Maji Maji was a massive attempt to throw off colonial rule which took

place in German East Africa during the years 1905-7. It involved over twenty different ethnic groups and an area of over 100,000 square miles.

Resentment of German rule had been growing amongst the peoples of this region since the beginning of the century. But although they were linked by certain cultural continuities, their political fragmentation made any concerted expression of this resentment very difficult. Along with the political fragmentation went a corresponding religious fragmentation. Each clan unit maintained a cult of its own ancestors, whilst people drawn from a number of clans might be habitués of the cult of a powerful nature spirit associated with some remarkable geographical feature of their area. There was, throughout the region, a more or less uniform concept of the supreme being. But this being was thought of as having little direct concern with the affairs of men, and received little ritual attention. In short, the region was one of small, fairly strongly bounded microcosms, with a religious life correspondingly focused on the lesser spirits rather than on the supreme being.

In this situation, there emerged a prophetic leader called Kinjikitile. Although he was a recent immigrant to the village where he lived, he seems to have hailed from somewhere within the region, and to have had a wide knowledge of its various cults. Kinjikitile's ministry began with possession by one of the powerful nature spirits which, though locally based, nonetheless appealed to people of several different clans. And it was with the voice of this spirit that he began to talk to people about uniting to make war upon the Germans. Later, however, he was commanded and possessed by the supreme being himself. In this capacity he announced that the supreme being was going to bring back to life the ancestors of all Africans, who would then fight as one to drive the Germans out.

Before long, delegations began to come in to Kinjikitile's village from all over the area. They were sent away with instructions about the uprising, with religious advisers given them by the prophet, and with holy water to neutralise German bullets. In the event, the leaders of the various war-parties lost their patience and rose before Kinjikitile had given his command. The prophet, caught off his guard, was captured and hanged by the Germans at the very beginning of the rising. Nonetheless, the peoples of the religion, fired by his ideas, succeeded in waging a concerted war for nearly two more years.

Kinjikitile brought people to see that the Germans were a scourge that transcended the innumerable inter-communal boundaries, and that, as such, they could only be fought by a mass movement whose members were willing to forget

about these boundaries. It is in this context that his religious innovations are best understood. Thus on the one hand, there was his promise that the ancestors would return and join the fight en masse. This was not just a promise of added strength in the trials to come. It was a promise to put into reverse the process that had created the ancestors in the first place; a promise, in other words, to liquidate the ancestors and their cult. Such a promise was nothing less than a commitment to remove the spiritual underpinnings of the clan microcosms. On the other hand, there was his emphasis on direct inspiration by the supreme being. And with this, of course, he provided a spiritual underpinning for his followers' new involvement in the wider world.

This is another example in which we cannot entirely rule out the possibility of Muslim or Christian influence. Gwassa, however, argues convincingly that Kinjikitile's ideas were a straightforward development of the indigenous cosmology of the region, and that his rituals were built up out of an indigenous symbolic vocabulary. Once more, then, it seems possible to discount the influence of the world religions; and once more, we are faced with an unambiguous link between microcosmic dissolution and a switch of attention from lesser spirits to supreme being. My last example is drawn from Middleton's description of Yakan, a cult which flourished among the Lugbara of East Africa between 1890 and 1920.

In the nineteenth century Lugbara were subsistence farmers, living in a large number of tiny, lineage-based communities under the authority of elders. The members of each community guarded its autonomy jealously; and their social relations were largely confined by its boundaries. They regarded the community as an oasis of morality, order, and stability in a desert of sub-human chaos. They saw all change as coming from the world outside, and saw it as bad by definition.

Lugbara had evolved a subtle cosmological scheme which made sense of their predicament and gave them some feeling of control over it. Two categories of lesser spirits guided the fortunes of each little community: ancestors and *adro*. Ancestors were the guarantors of communal prosperity, order, and authority. *Adro* were associated with the uncultivated bush around the area of settlement, and hence with natural phenomena in the strict sense. They were also associated with the vicious, self-seeking and innovative side of men; with their untamed or 'natural' side, as Middleton puts it. Thus whilst ancestors were forces of culture, *adro* were forces of nature in the widest sense. Again, whilst ancestors were forces of stability, *adro* were forces of change. Hence *adro*, though they were

part of the spiritual complement of the microcosm, were also a constant threat to its integrity. They were, moreover, a link with the chaotic and evil world outside, whose denizens were seen as controlled entirely by spirits of a similar kind. *Adro*, then, were a sort of spiritual fifth column; the means whereby the chaos of the world outside could at any time erupt into the microcosm.

‘Behind’ both ancestors and *adro* stood *Adroa* the supreme being, who had created the entire world, and who both sustained it and initiated all change. In some contexts, *Adroa* was associated equally with ancestors and *adro* for he was the creator and sustainer of both. In other contexts, however, he was associated with *adro* rather than with the ancestors. For although he was the ultimate originator of all change in the world, the *adro* spirits were the proximate means whereby such change was brought into the microcosm. Hence in any situation of change, *Adroa* and *adro* were thought to be closely linked.

Lugbara religious life was dominated by rituals performed for the two categories of lesser spirits. Direct approach to the supreme being was relatively rare. This was the setting in which *Yakan* began to develop. Of its early vicissitudes, from about 1890 to 1914, we know relatively little, except that it seems to have been a movement connected with a series of social dislocations and natural disasters. Our detailed knowledge dates from 1914, when, after a period of quiescence, it began to flourish mightily not only in Lugbaraland but in many neighbouring areas. The causes of this resurgence seem to have been, on the one hand the beginning of serious colonial administration, with all its interference in the life of the little communities, and, on the other hand, a series of devastating epidemics affecting both men and cattle.

The resurgence of *Yakan* in Lugbaraland was led by a prophet called Rembe, who hailed from the neighbouring Kakwa country. Like Kinjikitile among the Bantu to the south-east, Rembe convinced a great many Lugbara that both the Europeans and the epidemics were scourges which transcended the boundaries of the numerous little village communities, and that, as such, they could only be warded off by a response which ignored these boundaries. Appointing numerous deputies, he set up an organisation covering a large area of which Lugbaraland was only a part; an organisation which totally ignored both existing authorities and existing intercommunal boundaries.

Rembe was seen, in the first instance, as inspired by Dede an *adro* spirit. From the pool of this spirit, he and his deputies dispensed a water which was believed

to be proof both against European bullets and against the various epidemics. But Rembe was also thought to be directly inspired by the supreme being; and it was with the aid of this being that he proposed to bring the ancestors to life again to join the struggle.

Rembe and his followers were undoubtedly preparing for concerted resistance to colonial rule. But they became involved in a series of clashes with government forces before they were fully prepared. Rembe himself was captured and killed, along with many of his deputies. And by 1920 *Yakan* had lost its revolutionary impetus.

After 1920 most people moved toward a grudging acceptance of colonial rule. At the same time, there was an accommodation between the old and the new amongst Lugbara themselves. Thus the lineage communities and their elders continued in being; but they were much less self-contained and self-sufficient than in the good old days before *Yakan*. The new wider order of social relationships also continued in being; but those involved in it abandoned their total commitment to rejection of the old groupings and their authorities. In the sphere of religion, the ancestors survived Rembe's promise to bring them back to life; and lineage elders continued to invoke them as the ultimate sanction for disobedience. At the same time, although the spirit of Dede dropped back to the position of being just one among many powerful *adro* spirits, the *adro* generally remained much stronger vis-a-vis the ancestors. Finally, people remained more inclined to see the hand of the supreme being in their everyday affairs, and so more inclined to attempt frequent contact with him.

The basic processes of social and religious change associated with *Yakan* seem to have been remarkably similar to those associated with Maji Maji. Thus the leaders of *Yakan* were men who accepted that the boundaries of the microcosms were going to dissolve, and who were concerned to prepare other people for life in the larger world that would result. Again, their religious innovations can be readily understood as means toward this end. On the one hand, there was the proposal to bring the ancestors back to life. As many Lugbara were themselves aware, this was a proposal to liquidate the spiritual force, underpinning the integrity of the microcosms. On the other hand, there was the emphasis on the cult of an *adro* spirit and on the cult of the supreme being himself. Now the *adro* were the proximate means whereby the boundaries between the microcosms and the outside world might be broken down. And the supreme being was the

ultimate underpinner of life in the macrocosm. Hence this emphasis provided people with spiritual support for their efforts to cope with their new and less constrained existence.

The post-1920 developments can be understood in much the same terms. First, it became clear that the microcosms were destined to survive. Hence proposals to liquidate the spiritual forces underpinning them went out of vogue. Secondly, it became equally clear that life in the modern world involved a multiplicity of relationships that transcended the boundaries of the microcosms. Hence the lasting increase of emphasis on *adro* and the supreme being: forces concerned, respectively, with keeping the microcosms open to influences from the world outside, and with life on the wider stage of the world considered as a whole.

In the case of *Yakan*, it is impossible to ignore the influence of the Islamic world. Both the idea of inspired prophetic leadership in revolts against Europeans, and the idea of holy water with miraculous powers against bullets and epidemics, were taken in the first instance from peoples who had been in close contact with the Mahdist uprisings. And the terminology used by Rembe and other leaders bore ample witness to the Islamic-Arabic sources of these ideas. Nonetheless, the form the movement took once it got into Lugbaraland was largely determined by what the Lugbara themselves made of it. And what they made of it, as Middleton shows very clearly, can only be understood in terms of the premises of their own pre-existing cosmology. Here, then, we have a movement for which Islam clearly provided the trigger; but a movement which the most ardent of Islamists would be reluctant to describe in terms of 'conversion'. Once again, the nub of the matter seems to be that, given the structure of their own indigenous cosmology, people found the most reasonable adjustment to the weakening of microcosmic boundaries to be one which included (admittedly this time amongst other things) an increased emphasis on the presence and cult of the supreme being.

These four intracultural examples not only provide us with unambiguous instances of the link between weakening of microcosmic boundaries and increased attention to the supreme being, they also show us that this link derives from rational adaptation of existing beliefs to a changed social situation. Hence they lend additional significance to the general correlation suggested by my rather impressionistic cross-cultural 'tour'. At the same time, the cross-cultural evidence points to the probability that the kind of adaptive change which features in my four examples is one that has occurred very widely in the past. Between

them, then, the two kinds of evidence cited suggests that the Intellectualist Theory is a rather good guide to the understanding of religious variation and change in settings where the influence of Islam and Christianity can be discounted. At this point, perhaps, it would be wise to sound a note of caution. For the Intellectualist Theory deals with only one factor in the field of African religious change; albeit a most important factor. And where many factors are at work, as they undoubtedly are in this field, some of them will almost certainly operate in such a way as to undo the effects of others. Hence, even if the Theory is correct so far as the factor it deals with is concerned, one cannot expect that things *will always* go the way it says they should. One can only mutter ‘*ceteris paribus*’ and keep one’s fingers crossed. This, however, is true of any fruitful historical generalisation. So, given the caveat, I believe we are nonetheless justified in regarding the Theory as a source of genuine insight into the dynamics of the indigenous religions.

This conclusion has crucial implications for the validity of my interpretation of ‘conversion’ to Islam and Christianity. For one of the salient features of this interpretation is the proposition that African responses to the world religions are responses that were ‘in the air’ anyway. In other words, they are responses which, given the appropriate economic and social background conditions, would most likely have occurred in some recognisable form even in the absence of the world religions. And the only way of validating this proposition is to do what I have done here: i.e., show that, given a marked weakening of microcosmic boundaries, some of the principal developments associated with ‘conversion’ commonly did take place even in the absence of significant influence from either Islam or Christianity.

(Abridged)

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ON THE RATIONALITY OF CONVERSION PART II

By Robin Horton

(This is an abridged version which continues Horton's response to Fisher).

At first reading it is difficult to see just what Fisher's theoretical presuppositions are. Yet, clearly, he sees his paper as including, not only a destructive critique but also a constructive interpretation. Looking more closely we see that he is preoccupied with the idea of an 'essential underlying movement' of religious growth. This underlying movement governs men's reactions to monotheistic ideas. It has the following three phases:

1. *Quarantine* - A small group of people professes a monotheistic faith in the middle of a pagan area; but there is little or no exchange of religious ideas.
2. *Mixing* - Monolatric ideas diffuse from the original carriers into the minds of the surrounding population, becoming considerably mixed with pagan ideas in the process.
3. *Reform* - A small group of holy men who have kept the original monolatry untarnished moves into the 'mixing' area and attempts to convert the 'mixers' to a pure version of the faith.

What can we say about the usefulness of the scheme as a means of gaining insight into the processes of religious change in West Africa? In particular, what can we say about its usefulness as a means of gaining insight into the reaction to Islam?

In the first place, the idea that Quarantine, Mixing and Reform follow each other in inevitable sequence seems sadly out of touch with West African realities. The idea of such a sequence may be roughly applicable to areas where the jihads took place. But even in some of these areas where there were no jihads the sequence was more often Quarantine-Mixing-Mixing or Quarantine-Mixing-Quarantine. Indeed, what is remarkable about West Africa is not any inexorable progress towards monolatry, but, as Jack Goody puts it: 'The continuing movement of people like the Lodagaa into (and out of) the world religions like Islam and Christianity'. Secondly, the scheme ignores the very different responses given by members of different socio-economic categories confronted with Islam at a particular time and place. It thus obscures one of the most dramatic features of religious change in Africa.

In any case, even if we could trace the kind of inexorable sequence postulated

by Fisher, we should still be at the beginning of our struggles. For we should merely have described our findings: we should have done nothing to explain them. Does Fisher in fact attempt an explanation for his 'underlying sequence'? He certainly cites a number of factors which either inhibit or encourage the various phases of the sequence. Thus he tells us that the break-up of a great empire could bring about a temporary reversion from the Mixing to the Quarantine phase; that detachment from traditional society could help bring about conversion; that literacy served as a 'time-bomb of reform'; that conquest was a 'powerful solvent of traditional beliefs'. But he gives us no overall explanation of why 'the basic underlying progression has been towards a purer faith'. Indeed, the image that comes to mind in reading what he says on this matter is one of an inexorable juggernaut, rolling under its own momentum, where progress can be slowed a little or accelerated a little by events along the way, but can never be stopped. In short, not only does his scheme make a poor showing when it comes to describing the facts. It does not even begin to compete when it comes to explaining them.

In his reluctance to provide an overall causal explanation for what he takes to be a basic process of religious change, Fisher resembles many other committed Christian scholars engaged in the study of African religious life. These are the people I referred to in my earlier paper as 'Comparative Religionists'. I agree with him that the label is inelegant. It is misleading, in so far as it suggests that what is wrong with the work of these scholars is its comparative perspective. A better label, I think, would be: 'The Devout Opposition.' This has the virtue of bringing out the two salient characteristics of the members of the group: their strong Christian commitment and their opposition to causal explanations of religious belief and behaviour.

Some of the best known members of the Devout Opposition come from disciplines based on or closely linked to a theological training: disciplines such as 'Divinity', 'Religious Studies', and 'Comparative Religion'. Prominent in this category are Bolaji-Idowu and Harold Turner, authors of impressive monographs on aspects of Yoruba religious life. Others, however, come from within the social sciences. Prominent in this category are Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard and Victor Turner, both authors of classic works on East and Central African religious life.

All of these scholars are more or less strongly antagonistic to causal explanations. Harold Turner refers to those who attempt them as people with whom there can be 'no fruitful conversation'. Victor Turner sees them as trying

to deny the reality of the spiritual world because to acknowledge it would destroy their sense of self-sufficiency. Evans-Pritchard starts from the premise that causal explanation is appropriate to illusory beliefs, but not to true ones. For the Christian, all beliefs in a spiritual reality, whether monotheistic or polytheistic, are at least approximations to the truth. Hence it is fruitless to search for their causal antecedents.

Evans-Pritchard's statement is of particular interest in that it is quite explicit about the fundamental premise upon which the devout antagonism to causal analysis rests: the premise that statements about the causes of beliefs have negative implications for the truth-values of those beliefs. This premise is by no means confined to the devout. Indeed, most of the great atheistic sociologists of religion have been fired with the conviction that, by establishing the causes of religious belief, they could thereby establish its falsity. And in stressing the non-causal nature of religious belief in order to defend its truth value, the devout are merely accepting their opponents' basic assumption.

One has only to reflect a little on the logical consequences of this shared assumption to become aware of its absurdity. If the demonstration that one or more people had been caused to hold a given belief really were sufficient to demonstrate the falsity of this belief, we should soon be left with no truths at all! The more one thinks about it, indeed, the more one wonders how this assumption ever came to be so deeply entrenched in so many otherwise penetrating minds. This, however, is not the place for speculation on such matters. Suffice it here to call for its removal, as an entirely unnecessary obstacle to dialogue.

(Abridged)

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THE JUGGERNAUT'S APOLOGIA: Conversion to Islam in Black Africa

By Humphrey J. Fisher

This story begins with Robin Horton's thoughtful and stimulating article 'African conversion', published in *Africa* in 1971. My own 'Conversion reconsidered' followed in 1973. This was in part a response to Horton, though concentrating upon Islamic conversion, which had been only a supporting feature in Horton's chiefly Christianity-based argument. I also explored a little the possibilities for Muslim/Christian comparison in black Africa, a fruitful and promising field which has not figured prominently in the subsequent discussion, but to which I return briefly towards the end of the present article. Horton's own reply ('On the rationality of conversion', in 1975) being essentially rather acid in tone, it seemed best at the time to let the matter rest, which I did.

Perhaps that was unduly sensitive on my part. For the main point at issue is important: whether, as Horton believes, the essential patterns of religious development in black Africa, even Christian and Islamic development, are determined by the enduring influence of a traditional cosmology, which arises anew, like the phoenix, from the ashes of colonialism and conversion; or, as I would argue, a genuine religious transference is possible, unleashing a new force, which is neither quite like any religious expression 'outside' before being transferred in, nor yet the same as anything already 'inside', and which then, like a juggernaut, advances under its own momentum. Another reason for my decision not, after all, to abandon the field, is that the debate has attracted the attention of other scholars. Wyatt MacGaffey (1981: 48) has employed the term 'Devout Opposition', which Horton bestowed upon me and upon many more august authorities; and R.W. Wyllie has even written an article 'On the rationality of the Devout Opposition'. I.M. Lewis, in his preface to the second edition (1980) of *Islam in Tropical Africa*, gives pride of place to the argument between Horton and myself; he refers again to the discussion in his paper 'Syncretism and survival in African Islam' (1983: 65), which I have found of special interest, and from which I have incorporated some points in this present article. W.M.J. van Binsbergen cited the controversy in his study of religious change in Zambia (1981: 39-40). And so on. Hence the juggernaut's apologia.

The Intellectualist Theory

Let me begin by restating Horton's own basic model, which he calls the Intellectualist Theory. Here is his summary (1975: 219-20):

I start with the idea of a 'basic' African cosmology which has a two-tier structure, the first tier being that of the lesser spirits and the second that of the supreme being. The lesser spirits underpin events and processes in the microcosm of the local community and its environment, whilst the supreme being underpins events and processes in the macrocosm ... Where there is a development of factors making for wider communication (for instance, a development of long distance trade), the social life of those involved will no longer be so strongly confined by the boundaries of their microcosm ... less attention will be paid to the spirits, and more to the supreme being ... Even in this second situation, however, acceptance of Islamic or Christian patterns will be highly selective. Just what is accepted and what rejected will be largely determined by the structure of the 'basic' cosmology ... it is this view of the reaction [in black Africa] to Islam and Christianity which leads me to talk of them as catalysts for changes that were 'in the air' anyway.

Alongside this model, Horton has in his 'Rationality' paper marshalled series of ranks of examples, first to illustrate the links between macrocosm and supreme being, and then for Islam and the Theory as a whole. It is an impressive display, but the bulk of the material soon becomes unwieldy, and, more important, each example really calls for specialist analysis. The primary function of a discussion such as that between Horton and myself is, I think, to propose general principles, leaving it to regional and other experts to decide whether the principles fit the circumstances of this or that particular case. I do not, therefore, intend to respond with a battery of specific examples.

Swinging to the other extreme, a good case might be made for tackling the Intellectualist Theory on a broad methodological front. In many respects, the Theory is just too neat to be true. Black Africa presents an immense and bewilderingly diverse panorama. Can we really tease out a 'basic' African cosmology? It is not the existence of such traditional beliefs that I question but their uniformity; a uniformity all the more difficult to credit when we consider the enormous variety of African responses to, and interpretations of, both Christianity and Islam, and then remember that the Theory proposes that

‘just what is accepted and what rejected’ is all ‘largely determined’ by a single basic cosmology. Again, did the microcosm ever really exist, outside Eden? or does the very tidiness of the Theory mean that we take as our starting point a theoretical abstraction? And again, are the links between social group (micro or macrocosm) and cosmology (spirits or supreme being) quite so automatic? A concealed juggernaut is rather an implausible notion, but that is perhaps what we have here; a Weberian juggernaut of rationality ineluctably moving both thought and social organisation from the particular to the universal; marching all the while in uneasy tandem with the phoenix of the basic cosmology.

Neatness leads to two further difficulties. One is that a kind of historical determinism may creep in, as in this passage (Horton, 1975: 391-2).

*For, given the socio-political implications of the ‘basic’ cosmology, it follows that any plan to break down the autonomy of existing states and substitute a more international order **had** to evolve a plan to suppress the cults of the lesser spirits and boost the cult of the supreme being, and that any plan to enforce a more rigorous and exclusive monolatry **had** to be seen as fraught with dramatic political implications.*

Not the least noteworthy aspect of this quotation, discussing the situation in which militant Islam arises, is that the italics are Horton’s own. It is perfectly possible, however, to recommend, for example, ‘a more rigorous and exclusive monolatry’, if we allow that term, which my dictionary defines as ‘the actual worship of but one divinity, not necessarily a disbelief in others’, without insisting upon ‘dramatic political implications’: Lamin Sanneh’s admirable book (1979) on the Jakhanke people of the Senegambia, for instance, draws attention to the whole strand (hitherto often neglected by scholars) of reforming, but non-militant, Islam in West Africa. I agree, it is not possible to enforce such belief without political implications. But, by and large, it is not possible, without political implications, to enforce anything; and the political implications derive, often, as much from the fact of enforcement as from what is being enforced.

The second principal danger is that the Theory may encourage us to think in terms of an ‘overall explanation’: that I do not offer such an explanation is one of the criticisms which Horton advances against me (1975: 395). I mistrust overall causal explanations as all too likely to shade into single-cause explanations, whereas the multiplicity of causes in human affairs seems infinitely complex. Perhaps this hesitation on my part does derive somewhat from the fact that I am a member of Horton’s Devout Opposition,

‘devout in the sense of being a believer (though, perhaps a little curiously, his list of members includes non-Muslim names), opposing in the sense that I am reluctant to commit myself to an overall causal explanation; a reluctance which can, I believe, be fully justified by the realities of the human conditions. Wyllie (1980) has carefully examined this aspect of Horton’s argument, indicating where Horton’s criticisms tend to oversimplify the views of those whom he criticises, and suggesting that there is substance in the hesitation of the Devout Opposition concerning the search for overall causes, that such hesitation is not merely, as Horton claims, ‘an entirely unnecessary obstacle to dialogue’.

However, such methodological argument over the broadest front is, no more than the battery-of-examples approach, not what I intend in this article: I am content to continue with the patient comparison between Horton’s model and my own primarily within the specifically Muslim context. This is partly a prudent recognition of the limitations of my own resources; but it will also, I hope, help preserve the value of this sequence of papers as a teaching aid, which even beginning students of religion in Africa may be able to master.

Introducing the Juggernaut

I have already proposed, in contrast to the Intellectualist Theory, an alternative pattern, characterised very roughly by three stages: quarantine, mixing and reform:

In the quarantine stage, the faith is represented by newcomers: traders, perhaps, from North Africa, or refugees, or clerics employed in providing religious services such as prayer and divination for their pagan patrons. Orthodoxy is relatively secure because there are no converts, and thus no one to bring into the Muslim community heterodox beliefs and observances drawn from his or her non-Muslim past. In most places, quarantine was not maintained indefinitely, and sooner or later, as local people converted in increasing numbers, the stage of mixing succeeded, in which people combined the profession of Islam, and as it might be the quite sincere observance of many Islamic tenets, with many pagan survivals. Finally, often after a lapse of centuries, the candle of reform kept alight by the written word, and perhaps also by the devotion of some clerics who succeeded in maintaining an element of quarantine against the mixing all round them, burst into a conflagration and established the rule of the saints. [Fisher, 1973a: 31].

Horton did not think much of this: it makes, he said '... a poor showing when it comes to describing the facts. It does not even begin to compete when it comes to explaining them' (1975: 396). It is here that he regrets my failure to offer an overall causal explanation (1975: 395); and, developing this criticism further, he explains that the image which comes to his mind, in reading my account: 'is one of an inexorable juggernaut, rolling forward under its own momentum, whose progress can be slowed a little or accelerate a little by events along the way, but can never be stopped' (1975: 395-6).

In a sense this is exactly right as a description of my hypothesis, though the phrasing is not quite what I should myself have chosen. Juggernaut is an emotive word nowadays, but it does have its own contribution to make in our discussion: derived from a Hindu title of Krishna, it incorporates the idea of devotees sacrificing even their lives in the religious cause and thus it echoes the same degree of total commitment which may be found among some of the most dedicated Muslims of black Africa. Certainly it responds to, and is shaped by, local needs; perhaps this may be covered by the words 'slowed a little or accelerated a little'. It may even be halted for a time, even put into reverse for a time. But that it should ever be finally stopped is difficult to imagine, and thus even the word 'inexorable' seems admissible.

The key words, however, in the description which Horton has provided for me are these, 'under its own momentum'. If by 'it' we mean the Islamic tradition, embodied in the Islamic community, then yes, I agree. 'It' does have its own momentum. 'It' is not, I believe, acting primarily as a catalyst for changes more basically determined by the adaptation and evolution of the local pre-Muslim heritage: it does have its own momentum.

This is the crux of the matter. It is here, I think, that Horton and I most seriously diverge in our judgments. The idea that Islam in black Africa continues indefinitely to be 'more than anything else' a catalyst 'for changes that were "in the air" anyway' (Horton, 1975: 373) seems to me to overlook entirely the extent to which black Africans have, most profoundly, made Islam their own even, in some instances, in its most rigorous *sufi* expressions or, more recently, Wahhabi or neo-Wahhabi forms and have yielded themselves to Islam. And the same is true of Christianity. Horton, looking so searchingly, but abstractly, at Islam and Christianity in Africa, seems in danger of overlooking African Muslims and Christians.

The Beginning of Mixing

I. The Cleric

But what starts the juggernaut rolling? What first begins to break down the barriers of quarantine; and to allow mixing to begin? Or, to ask the same question, but in terms of the Intellectualist Theory, what weakens the boundaries of the microcosm, and begins to undermine the power of the spirits? It is the same question, in a sense: and the fact that Horton asks it more from, so to speak, within the African microcosm, and I rather from within the quarantised pioneer Islamic presence, is indicative of our looking at the same evidence from vantage points that are different but yet perhaps fundamentally compatible. To this compatibility I return at the conclusion of this article.

Obviously, there has to be some avenue of approach: there must be an Islamic presence of some kind, somewhere within reach. To this extent, the macrocosm has already begun to encroach upon the microcosm. And, for the Islamic presence to make itself felt, the microcosmic boundaries must have begun to weaken. A non-Islamic microcosm, perfectly stable in its self-sufficiency, would offer, we may suppose, no chink in its armour through which the first darts of Islam might penetrate. But we have already suggested that this must be a matter of supposition, since such a macrocosm is almost impossible to visualise, much less to find.

It may be that the attractive elements of Islam are parts of its outward appearance for it is, in its regular practice, in many respects a very outward looking religion, expressing itself visibly. The formal prayers, the distinctive dress, the food regulations, the fasting; any of these features, or others, may catch the attention, and stimulate imitation. If we apply here the distinction (overdrawn though I believe it to be which E.M. Zuesse (1979: 8) makes between religions of structure (among which he places African traditional belief) and religions of salvation, we may gain a deeper understanding of the impact of outward Islamic rituals in the non-Islamic African setting. The entire purpose of the religion of structure, Zuesse argues, is not to remove the cult member from the experimental world of multiplicity ..., but to anchor the cult member in this world ... One must see every thing as symbol. It takes constant repetition and dramatisation to achieve this ritual vision of life. Religions of salvation, on the other hand, inculcate a type of concentration which systematically removes attention from sensory experience, and focuses it on the internal processes of subjective thought and awareness.

More important, in first opening the way for Islam, are likely to be the pains and hazards of the human condition. Inevitably there will be tensions, shortcomings, dangers, misfortunes, for which special remedies may be sought, if need be quite outside the normal channels. If a child is ill, the mother may seek healing anywhere. If a particularly challenging and puzzling dream needs interpretation, the dreamer may seek advice anywhere. If the village is at war with its neighbour, the aid of any accessible holy man to pray for the success of his clients' arms, to provide them with amulets and other protective devices, to divine the most propitious moment for their expedition to set out, to pray against the enemy, may be sought. There is nothing necessarily Islamic about any of this: similar phenomena occur, for example, in early Ethiopian Christian history (Kaplan, 1982), while examples within African traditional religions are legion. But, if there is a Muslim cleric available, his aid may very well be enlisted (Fisher, 1971, 1973b, 1979).

As a single example of the often severely practical nature of some of these clerical services, and also of their availability to clients more or less regardless of who those clients were; let me cite the awkward predicament of the cleric Mammadu Maraamu, at Sunokunda, in the Gambia. Two principalities in the area, Niumi and Jokadu, were on the verge of war. Jokadu got to the cleric first, and he prepared charms for them. This evidently had to be done at night, and one of the cleric's wives, who thus lost his company that night, took Jokadu's payment for the charms. When, subsequently, messengers from Niumi arrived the cleric told them. 'I have exhausted all my powers on behalf of the people of Kodakdu.' But he had reckoned without another of his wives, whose turn it was to sleep with him that night. She, having her eye on the prospective Niumi payment, told her husband, '... it's either work for these people, or our marriage is finished'! So he did (Innes, 1978: 57).

II. Is the Supreme Being There?

I have suggested that the microcosm is rather too theoretical, abstract and 'tidy' starting point. Somewhat similarly, I think that the Intellectualist Theory directs our attention too much, at least in this early stage, towards the supreme being; whether He appears in Islamic or Christian guise, or in purely African form according to Horton's thought-experiment, in which we try to imagine what religious developments might have taken place in black Africa had Christianity

and Islam not been there, while all other elements of the modern situation still obtained, a truly Herculean imaginative feat (Horton, 1971: 102; Fisher, 1973a: 28). This assumption, if I understand Horton correctly, that God is directly involved, from the outset of any change away from the microcosm, seems to me unwarranted. He may be there, but not necessarily: when the microcosmic boundaries weaken, this may very well appear, on the spot, as the encroachment of one microcosm upon another, rather than as any general shift towards the macrocosm; and in fact God may sometimes be found tucked away pretty snugly within the microcosm, and not only in an otiose capacity, for example, in some myths of creation, in which creation may be perceived as quite a local phenomenon.

I fell into this particular ditch myself, in my previous article, rather carelessly. ‘Nock reminds us’, I wrote, citing A.D. Nock’s *Conversion*, ‘that Naaman heard of Jehovah through his Hebrew handmaid, just as’, I added’, a Yoruba potentate might have learnt of the God of the Muslims through his Fulani slave’ (Fisher, 1973a: 33; Nock 1969: 6). But I did not check the Bible; and neither, it proves, had Nock. The Hebrew lass didn’t mention Jehovah; what she said was ‘Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy’ (II Kings 5:3). But Nock assumed, and I followed him in his assumption and I think the Intellectualist Theory assumes, that God ought to be there at the beginning of any such venture into, or rather towards, for it may be a distant goal indeed, monotheism. I don’t think He is, in fact, essential: what is of vital importance, for this first step, is that the Muslim cleric should be regarded as able to help, just as the handmaid was sure that Elisha could help her master.

The cleric isn’t the only helper, of course; he works, at least in the eyes of his clients, on very much the same footing as any other dealer in spiritual resource. He may not even be particularly effective, and his pagan competitors may win greater trust. But, to the extent that the Muslim cleric is accessible, and is consulted, to that extent the seeds of religious change, of a new cosmology, had been sown.

The Juggernaut on the Move: The Cumulative Impact of Islam

Thus the juggernaut is set moving: and it will keep on the move, albeit sometimes at an almost imperceptible pace, even with occasional pauses, or a slide backwards. An essential element, in the maintenance of this momentum,

lies, I think in the cumulative impact of Islamic witness, both contemporaneously over space and chronologically over time.

I have remarked already that the provider of spiritual resource, whether Muslim cleric or pagan priest, may seem in his clients' eyes to be always much the same, though one practitioner may achieve a greater reputation for effectiveness than another. There is, however, one critical difference: whatever success any Muslim practitioner may achieve will contribute also to the reputation of other similar Muslim practitioners: given the natural human tendency to remember successes rather than failures; one case of rain in answer to prayer will outweigh a score of droughts during which prayer proved unavailing: the Muslim record will tend gradually to build up a decisive advantage. Similarly, the outward signs of Islam, such as dress or the prayer, manifested here, there and somewhat else, reinforce one another by their uniformity. There is a kind of cross-referencing: a cumulative contemporaneous impact is built up.

Islam is advantaged in another respect also: there is built into the essence of the religion a remarkable degree of mobility, exemplified by the haji or pilgrimage, by the jihrah or symbolic act of withdrawal, by various itinerants such as the travelling student, or the wandering sharif or descendant of the Prophet. A wider and wider network is built up. There is an illuminating passage in P.H. Gulliver's *Neighbours and Networks*:

... I wish to direct especial attention and give added emphasis to the cumulative effect of an endless series of incidents, cases, events that may be quite as significant in affecting and changing social relationships as the more dramatic encounters. Lesser events ... also serve gradually to set the stage for the bigger encounters. In other words, I am advocating ... that careful attention should be given to the continuum of interaction amongst the given collection of people. [1971: 354; Turner, 1974: 34].

This applies very well to the point I am trying to make about the cumulative impact of Islamic contacts and examples. The key shift comes with the final phrase, 'the given collection of people'. Gulliver was working on a very limited stage amongst a particular group in southern Tanganyika: but the 'given collection' of Muslim (or just partly Muslim) people is vast indeed. Anyone who embarks upon this particular 'continuum of interaction' will find himself gradually drawn into the macrocosm of Islam: Islam in black Africa is not essentially the corollary to a macrocosm introduced by some other factor: Islam itself is the macrocosm, and

the most microcosmic of neophyte Muslims has already, wittingly or unwittingly, set his face towards that macrocosm.

Several of the above points are neatly illustrated by an oral account collected in Mali by Louis Brenner (1984: 87-8):

*A Dogon became aware that the fetishes of his religion varied one from another. The fetishes which were placed between two villages and those in each compound were different from each other. Even those of his mother and his father were not the same. He could not understand this. He then investigated Islam. He asked someone to write the **fatiha** [the first sura of the Qu'ran] for him. He then erased it and went to another teacher and asked him to write the **fatiha**. He did so and what had been erased reappeared. The dogon found that it was the same. He erased it again and went to another person, one who had recently become a Muslim, and asked him to write the **fatiha**. As he began to write, the same **fatiha** appeared. This is the truth', exclaimed the Dogon, 'not the fetishes'.*

The Dogon seeker then pursued his quest for Islam at a deeper level; and, to be sure, the cumulative impact is not only the repeated underlining of the same points, but also a deepening understanding of those same points, and the addition of new ones. Even if the Dogon story is told from a Muslim point of view, it is unlikely to have been told at all if it did not correspond in some measure to the locally perceived realities of the situation (For a brief consideration of the cumulative impact in a Christian context, see Gray, 1983: 49).

The cumulative impact is chronological as well as contemporaneous. And a cumulative impact over any considerable period of time depends upon literacy, so that what has been achieved at one period may be preserved, and then placed beside, added to, used as foundations, for the achievements of another period. This is what I was trying to get at in my previous article, in a paragraph which particularly provoked Horton. Here is the original passage:

... we may suggest that movements of religious reform or change or development, have been in the air quite often, even in purely pagan situations. Sudden outbursts of enthusiasm leading to any one of a number of reforms: the destruction of fetishes, new witch-finding sweeps, and many others, very probably occurred from time to time, not being similarly the creation of European colonial stress and strain. But, though in the air, these seem rarely to have got permanently off the ground, and

... the apparent implication is that a Muslim or Christian contribution is necessary for such tendencies to be sustained. This may be, in part, because for progress to be carried over from one leap forward to the next, literacy is necessary: otherwise much of the ground gained may be lost through backsliding later. Literacy does not prevent this, but does facilitate eventual recovery. [Fisher, 1973:29].

To which this was the reply:

Fisher also criticises the assumption ... that the traditional had a potential for radical and enduring change before the advent of the world religions and of literacy. In these circumstances, he says, significant changes 'seem rarely to have got permanently off the ground'. Indeed, far from the responses to Islam and Christianity having been 'in the air' anyway, it is only with the advent of these two religions that such changes became possible at all. In other words, the indigenous religions were essentially static, and it took Islam and Christianity to infuse some degree of dynamism into the religious scene. This last proposition is very odd indeed. [Horton, 1975: 222].

I agree. But this was not the proposition I advanced. The 'other words'; are Horton's, not mine. It is with the permanence of such changes as did occur that I am concerned, and it is possible, in my view, to build up a fairly persuasive case. Let me illustrate with two examples.

Joseph Miller's excellent book *Kings and Kinsmen: early Mbundu States in Angola* describes a very radical new departure among the Imbangala, in the seventeenth century. Radical it certainly was, but enduring? there's the rub. For, with the passage of time, this new departure seems gradually to have subsided, and eventually almost to have disappeared.

In the end, the Imbangala kings survived as rulers of the Mbundu only by trading the alien political institutions, which had originally enabled them to effect the revolution in Mbundu politics described in the preceding chapters, for local ideas, institutions, and symbols. [Miller, 1976: 224]

Well before the Imbangala effervescence began in Angola the first *askiya*, in 1493, had seized power in the Songhay empire, on the Niger bend. The *askiya* was a Muslim, and wished to justify his action in Islamic terms, so he enlisted the help of a North African apologist, al-Maghili, to whom he put a series of questions. It is most unlikely, I suspect, that these were really 'questions for

information'. It seems far more probable that the *askiya* knew what he wanted to hear; and assuredly he got the answers he wanted. Nevertheless the Islamic reforming vigour of the dynasty petered out. Horton (1975: 376) discusses this briefly, within the context of the Intellectualist Theory, just as did the energies of the Imbangala, and, without literacy, it would have left no more trace behind than did the Imbangala. But al-Maghili's answers had been written down, and they remained: and their justification for waging *jihad* (religious war) against 'mixing', but professing, even so, and that was the tenderer point – Muslims had a profoundly significant charter for militant reform in the nineteenth century. This is the kind of cumulative impact over time that I have in mind.

It is my belief that this impact was, and is, primarily religious, responding of course to a multitude of other factors, but not essentially determined by them.

I see religion as having what Turner (1967, I: p. xiv) calls 'a *sui generis*' initiative and activity of its own', ranging over the whole gamut of religious expression from the severely utilitarian prayers-on-demand of the local cleric to the highest idealism of saints, scholars or reformers. And it is my belief also that this religious impact was, and is, primarily Islamic. It responds, of course, to its non-Islamic religious setting: indeed, it is possible to see the cumulative impact at work also in exactly this way, for each instance of Islamic witness, reiterating this or that point of Islamic faith or practice, must occur in a specific local setting (unless the observer be far away, on pilgrimage for instance). Each successive new local setting for the Islamic witness contributes to the Africanisation of the way in which that witness is perceived, and presented. But the consistency of the witness of a religion both universal and literate ensures that the non-Islamic religious setting does not exercise a decisively determining influence. The Islamic community is rolling forward under its own momentum.

The divergence between Horton's understanding of the nature and influence of this literary heritage and my own may be neatly exemplified by Ibn Battuta's account of his visit to ancient Mali, in the fourteenth century. Postulating a resurgence of microcosmic loyalties in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (a resurgence which he then deploys as the main cause of the rise of militant Islamic reform), Horton suggests how exasperating it must have been for the prospective *jihad* leaders to learn, from reading historical accounts, 'just how wretchedly, in this respect, the political systems of the day compared with the great empires of the past'. 'Imagine', Horton continues, 'for instance, the

feelings of an Usman dan Fodio or an Al-Haji Umar, comparing the chaos of the areas around them with the order and security described by Ibn Battuta' (1975: 388-9 and n.). It is true that Ibn Battuta was very complimentary about law and order over a wide area in ancient Mali (Levtzion and Hopkins, 1981: 296), and, had the macrocosm (in its political expression, to be sure) been uppermost in the reformers' minds, they might indeed have reacted to Ibn Battuta in exactly this way, taking Mali as he described it for their model. But, at the same time, Ibn Battuta was scandalised by the many Islamic shortcomings which he observed: the delightfully free women among the Masufa Berbers just north of Mali, free even vis-a-vis clerics (ibid.: 286); the distribution of royal alms during Ramadan (very pious, this), but done in Mali by female slaves, stark naked (ibid.: 296-7); the violation of food regulations (ibid.: 297); the reception of, and catering for, a cannibal delegation at the court (ibid.: 298); and more.

If religious matters, and proper Islamic standards - that is to say, the macrocosm in its religious expression, the macrocosm of Islam as a universal religion - if these had been uppermost in the reformers' minds, then Ibn Battuta's king of Mali, far from being a model, would have been (law and order notwithstanding) as clearly a 'mixer', and thus quite as liable to the full wrath of al-Maghili and his heirs, as for example any Hausa king condemned by Usman dan Fodio. As there is no evidence to suggest that Ibn Battuta's account was known to West African scholars in the nineteenth century, the whole point remains no more than another 'thought-experiment': but it does epitomise the two divergent views very well.

Ancient Mali returns a little later in Horton's argument (1975: 390 n.), again in a defence of the view that the period 1600 - 1800 was one of the reassertion of the microcosm over the macrocosm, which reassertion in turn prompted the rise of militant Islam. Commenting on recent scholarship, which tends to reassess this 'dark age' interpretation, Horton writes that the reassessment does 'not seem to have refuted the claim that, during the period 1600 - 1800, the level of political development and integration in western savannas on the whole compared unfavourably with that which prevailed in the heyday of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay'. Even if this be true, the question remains, who was to make the comparison? Ghana and ancient Mali do not seem to have figured in the conscious historical backdrop of, for example, the reformers in Hausaland, who were the most important, thoroughgoing and successful of all; and, while they did know of Songhay, it was in particular al-Maghili, and his specially Islamic

concerns, which interested them, and not any macrocosmic politico-economic stability. Indeed, Jean Rouch (1953) has argued that just such Islamic concerns, the intrusion of Islamic reform, positively destabilised Songhay; the religious macrocosm was at odds with the political macrocosm.

The Juggernaut at Speed: Militant Reform

The roots of militant Islamic reform in West Africa may be traced back well before 1800, to the fifteenth century, for example, with al-Maghili, or to the seventeenth century western Sahara (Curtin, 1971); but the nineteenth century was clearly its high water mark. Even the nineteenth century *jihads*, however, Horton believes, 'can be understood as responses by bearers of the 'basic' West African cosmology to certain economic and social changes' (1975: 381). To plead for an independent Islamic input, or at least my plea for such an input, is, if I understand him correctly, to imply that the *jihads* 'took place in a socio-economic vacuum' (ibid.): though surely it is unnecessary to draw such sharp dividing lines, since it is self-evident that no human events take place in such a vacuum, and that the interplay of causal forces may very well include socio-economic, local religious, and wider Islamic elements, as well as a host of others. Let me try to come to grips with Horton's argument, which combines massed examples with often adventurously sweeping generalisations, under two heads in particular: one is selectivity, the other the new cosmology.

The Selectivity Argument

Selectivity has from the beginning been a crucial element in Horton's argument: local acceptance of Islamic patterns will be highly selective, and that selectivity will be 'largely determined by the structure of the 'basic' cosmology' (Horton, 1975: 220). Horton elaborates this point in his discussion of Mahdist eschatology, which was especially vibrant round about 1800, and which is manifestly one of the more difficult themes to fix securely in the framework of 'responses by bearers of the 'basic' West African cosmology [-does this imply a slight retreat from the idea of a single, pan-Africa, 'basic cosmology'?-] to certain economic and social changes' (1975: 381). While not denying the importance of such factors as Madhism, Horton goes on to argue that the reaction to them *can only* be explained in terms of the contemporary socio-cultural situation *within* West Africa. To those who find it hard to sympathize with this contention, I can only

say once again that they should remember how very selective the peoples of West Africa have been in their response to both Islam and Christianity. For this selectivity *makes any other standpoint untenable*. [1975: 392n: the first and third italics are my own]

Horton here deploys selectivity not only as part of the description of the Intellectualist Theory, but also as a proof of that Theory. There are, it seems to me, three difficulties with the selectivity argument: a precise difficulty, a practical difficulty, and a logical difficulty.

1. *The precise difficulty* - This arises from the Intellectualist Theory itself, which affirms that Islam and Christianity were effective mainly as catalysts for *changes that were in the air anyway*. The thought-experiment seeks to demonstrate that, in the absence of the world religions, similar developments (such as the increasing importance of the supreme being) would have occurred even so - developments which are recognisably the same in essence as those which have in fact occurred with the help of the world religions. In the Mahdist case this seems, I think, to require that something like Mahdism was 'in the air' in West Africa, and would have emerged even without the Islamic prompting. It might be possible to argue this but the argument would seem likely to become so hypothetical, perhaps even metaphysical, as to demand the utmost casuistry to adduce firm considerations whether for it or against. If, however, in the Mahdist case we are simply asked to recognise that local factors may be influential in helping to determine just which external elements are adopted, then there is really nothing to dispute about, since no one would suggest (save by way of setting up a straw man for ease of demolition in argument) that new elements are accepted in a vacuum: though I confess that Horton's choice of words, 'can only be explained', and 'makes any other standpoint untenable'; does rather suggest that he is attributing an unduly preponderant influence to such local factors.
2. *The practical difficulty* - The practical difficulty is that selection is inevitable: it is inextricably a part of the human condition. It would be quite impossible for anyone, anywhere, at any time, to adopt the whole of Islam. I cannot today, for example, be an Ahmadi and a neo-Wahhabi at the same time, nor a Hamallist and a Mouride, nor even a Qadiri and a Tijani, to cite only some of the primary alternatives most readily available within West Africa. For a Muslim there in 1800 the range of choices would have been somewhat less,

but still far more than any one individual could possibly encompass, even within a single Islamic school of thought, choices would have to be made. Indeed, the fact that such a wide variety of different Islamic choices is on offer in West Africa, and that so many different selections have been made there, does seem to strengthen the argument for some independence of choice within the Islamic context, some 'momentum of its own' within Islam there. It could, of course, be argued that this independence is only an appearance, that each individual case, upon closer study, would reveal the determining influence of local factors. But this would lead us into a further difficulty, for it is hard to defend, at one and the same time and equally persuasively, on the one hand such a diversity of local effects, leading one man to become an Ahmadi, acknowledging a prophet after Muhammad, claiming that Christ has returned, renouncing (and denouncing) military *jihad*, studying the Qu'ran in English (Fisher, 1963); another to become a hard-liner neo-Wahhabi, reintroducing the amputation of the hands of thieves, in specially prepared public stadium (the first modern, public amputations took place just before Christmas in 1983, but it was to be sure in Khartoum, not in West Africa) and yet another to become a non-paying, peanut-growing Bay Fall Mouride (Cruise O'Brien, 1971: ch. 7) - to have all this, and much more, and yet on the other hand to maintain even so that there is essentially a single 'basic' cosmology, which itself largely determines such choices.

A further point weighing against the decisive influence of local factors, and in favour of some free play of choice within the Islamic tradition, is provided by the puzzling selection, by some of the militant reformers, of legal details entirely (it seems) irrelevant for the West African setting. When Usman dan Fodio himself composed one of his major works, *Bayan wujub al-hirah 'ala 'l-ibad*, very much with the idea of practical guidance in mind, he included such provisions as this one (taken from his discussion of those against whom *jihad* should be undertaken): 'Likewise ... the monk retired in a monastery or hermitage is [not to be killed] except when he plans and conspires against the Muslims. Priests in churches should be killed without an exception' (Masri, 1978: 86). Usman dan Fodio never saw a Christian in his life: there wasn't a priest or a church, or a monk, within hundreds, maybe thousands of miles. Again, when Muhammad Bello, Usman dan Fodio's son and successor in the Sokoto caliphate, the foremost 'reforming' state, wrote manuals of advice

for his officials, as a very practical exercise to encourage good government, he listed, among other details, the appropriate rates of taxation for vineyards, calculated in dirhams (Minna, 1982: 255). But not a grape grows in the length and breadth of the Sokoto state, and the dirham coin did not circulate there. Why, then, were such provisions passed on in West Africa. Was it perhaps no more than an uncritically profuse marshalling of earlier sources, a gentle form of academic ostentation? I cannot tell; but it does rather seem as though such rules, by their very irrelevance for the local situation, must point to a motivation outside that situation. Selectivity in itself proves nothing about the standards which guide that selection. Granted that selectivity is inevitable, we are left with the problem of trying to discern just what is selected, and to determine why or whether we are concerned preeminently with local factors, such as the 'basic' cosmology, or with Islamic factors (whether of central significance in West Africa, like Mahdism, or of extreme marginality like monks and vineyards), or with a balance of both.

3. *The logical difficulty* it might, I suppose, be argued that some details, such as monks and mahdis, come in more or less accidentally, as part of other, more substantial, Islamic elements the selection of which has been largely determined by the 'basic' cosmology. This leads to my third difficulty concerning the selectivity argument, the logical one: even if it be granted that the initial selection is largely determined by the 'basic' cosmology', surely it is possible that selection may include some items which will eventually change the cosmology, even if they do not do so, or do not do so much right at the beginning? Such potentially revolutionary items might be chosen deliberately, or might slip in almost unnoticed, a kind of Pandora's box. I am sure that few 'mixing' Muslims realise quite what lies waiting for them at the other end of the road, when they take their first few hesitant steps towards the new religion. Nevertheless, as I said above, the seeds of a new cosmology are being sown.

The New Cosmology

That there was - and even that there is, I think - a new cosmology at all, Horton denies. There was 'no radical change in cosmology,' 'no dramatic confrontation of disparate cosmologies' (1975: 394). He explains that it is the essential assumption for his interpretation '... of the West African response to Islam ...'

that all concerned, from unrepentant pagans to purist Muslimism, share the same cosmological framework; not only do they all 'share the same basic two-tier schema' of lesser spirits and supreme being, but they are all 'fully aware of doing so' (1975: 393-4). Very logically, therefore, he must put the term, 'conversion' between inverted commas, as of doubtful appropriateness.

He suggests that I may find this shocking. That is overstating the case somewhat, but I do not, to be sure, find the argument fully convincing. Let us look at it more closely. First of all, it is clear that in the new situation there is conflict, and that this conflict is religious, or, at the least, religiously expressed. Those concerned might well have echoed the words of St Paul (Ephesians 6:12), had they known them: '... our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but ... against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms'. This conflict may be formulated in two distinct ways, and both, I think, pose certain difficulties for the Intellectualist Theory.

On the one hand, we might stress the clash between Islam and traditional religion, with the militant Muslim reformers regarding their task as in part 'a continuation of the long struggle for mastery between the Islamic and Pagan supernatural' (Last, 1967: 5; quoted with approval by Horton, 1975: 394 n.). To conform with the Theory, such a confrontation should, I suppose, be reducible, in its essentials, to a clash between lesser spirits and supreme being. There are awkward points about this. The lesser spirits are not entirely on the traditional side: many may be found, in the form of angels, jinns, and the like, fully incorporated within Islam, and at least some of these are of impeccable credentials. Nor is the supreme being so predominant on the Islamic side as we might at first expect. In many cases the conflict is regarded (and remembered) locally as essentially between 'clerics', holy men, the wielders of spiritual resource, on both sides. The supreme being stands behind the Muslims, of course, at least in the Muslims' own opinion, but He is not necessarily more prominent for them than He was for the Hebrew handmaid of Naaman.

But, even if we were sure that the spiritual conflict between Muslims and pagans was simply a restatement of such conflict between supreme being and lesser spirits, would that entitle us to say that the 'basic' cosmology' had not changed? Is it not rather the case that what is introduced, by this line of argument, into that cosmology (in so far as it ever actually existed in the first place) is civil war and revolution? And that, it seems to me, is one major factor entitling,

compelling us to speak of a new cosmology. One fundamental novelty introduced, in the long run, by Islam has been the idea of an exclusive religious allegiance.

I said that two formulations of the spiritual conflict are possible: the second formulation is that between reformed and unreformed Muslims. To many of the reformers, I think, this formulation of their conflict was more urgent, more harrowing, than any clash with out-and-out pagans: and, while it is difficult enough as we have just seen to fit the Muslim-pagan confrontation neatly into the two-tier schema, it seems to me far more difficult still to do so with the reformed-unreformed intra-Islamic confrontation.

Even if that could be done also, we should still be left with the fact that, with Islam, the novel notion of an exclusive religious allegiance has arrived, together with literacy, to which we have already paid considerable attention in this article. Another, probably derived in considerable measure from literacy, is the new sense of linear, rather than cyclical or circular time: Islam and Christianity, both emphasise linear time, culminating in the apocalypse. Again, the profoundly important role of the Prophet Muhammad, and, albeit understood in deeply significantly different terms, the role of Christ, the Christ-event; both these innovations stand squarely outside any 'two-tier' cosmology.

Islam, in particular reformed Islam, presents West Africa with an exclusive, literate, eschatological cosmology, conscious of linear time, pivoted upon an historical personality: it is, therefore, a new cosmology. (For a similar argument about the novelty of the Christian cosmology. See Gray, 1978: 96-100.)

In all this it is important to remember that the juggernaut is on the move, the cumulative impact of Islam is gradually taking shape. What may at first be a new cosmology only in embryo will later develop further. It is this sense of the internal dynamic of Islam which led me, in my previous article, to speak (where Horton hesitates to use the term 'conversion' at all) of two conversions, the first representing the earliest steps of the new believer into (or towards) Islam, the second representing the often later, and sometimes very much later, recognition of the full implications (or some of them) of those first steps (1973a: 36-7). Very interestingly, referring to initiation into special cults, such as the *bori* or *zar*, Lewis (1983: 65) says that 'what is really involved is, in fact, often a kind of conversion'. Since in many cases those being initiated are already Muslims, this is another instance of 'second' conversion, though hardly of conversion into reform. Lewis's article is especially valuable for its attention to the diversity of

currents within what I have called just above 'the internal dynamic of Islam'.

Let us turn back, for a moment, to Usuman dan Fodio. Developing his argument that the 'basic' cosmology carried over even into reformist Islam, Horton points out that it was only logical for the revolutionaries to 'emphasise the cult of the supreme being', '... this, of course, was the central feature of the militant religious programme' (1975: 391). In a sense, obviously, this is so: Islam is an uncompromisingly monotheist religion. But, if we look at the abundant writings which the reformers have left, we see that emphasising the cult of the supreme being - I suppose that might be, among other things, *tawhid* the science of the unity of God - is not much to the forefront. The single problem which, more than any other, exercised the mind, and racked the conscience, of Usuman dan Fodio was precisely the problem of distinguishing between 'mixing' and reforming Muslims. It was the immediacy of this issue, in the nineteenth century, which chiefly explains the great popularity of al-Maghili's 'answers' at that time.

It is a popular trend of argument nowadays to decry any attempt to distinguish between mixed and reformed Islam. Edward Alpers writes (1972: 172):

... One of the annoying preoccupations of many scholarly discussions of Islam in Africa, in general, has been unwarranted concern over the 'unorthodox nature' of African Islam. This essentially deprecating attitude has, it seems to me, frequently led to a simplistic interpretation of the dynamic interaction between pre-Islamic and Islamic beliefs and practices.

And I.M. Lewis (1980: p. viii), speaks of the stages of my model as seen:

... from the perspective of an external Muslim observer, or one applying the external standards of Islamic observance and belief. They do not necessarily, however, convey what the people (or person) so characterised consider themselves to be: Muslim or non-Muslim.

It is indeed not the business of an outsider to answer the questions 'Who is a Muslim?' 'What are the permitted limits of unorthodoxy?' But these are not inherently the questions of outsiders. The most urgent scholarly, and popular discussion of them takes place within the Muslim community. What people consider *themselves* to be is only one side of the coin: what they, within West Africa, consider *each other* to be is the other side. Nor are these issues now a dead letter. They are as lively today as ever, with probably more people involved in such controversy than ever before (see, for example, Hiskett, 1980). Men's

lives have depended upon the answers in the past in the very recent past, indeed, in Nigeria, and will assuredly, alas, do so again. To leave such questions out of scholarly analysis is rather like having Hamlet without the prince, Wonderland without Alice.

I do not believe that such questions lead necessarily to 'simplistic interpretation of the dynamic interaction between pre-Islamic and Islamic beliefs and practices': if such an interpretation is the result, and no doubt it sometimes is, then that may be because the questions have been wrongly posed, or wrongly explored: it is not that the questions are in themselves fundamentally misdirected. Perhaps Alper's own summary of the situation; 'dynamic interaction between pre-Islamic and Islamic' itself reflects a simplistic interpretation of another kind, just as, in this respect, my own model of 'quarantine-mixing-reform' does: for, in many instances, the specifically 'pre-Islamic' element of the mix is very much less than Alpers's complaint, and my model, both seem to imply, while the Islamic element may be multifarious in the extreme. To begin with, pre-Islamic is not always the most apt term: for example, when General Gordon is recruited into the Sudanese pantheon of spirits of the zar cult it is clear that 'mixing' is taking place, but it is with *non*, rather than pre-Islamic elements (Lewis, 1983: 73). Again, the very wide dissemination, within Islamic society, of cults such as the *bori* and *zar* means that these can certainly not be regarded as *local* pre-Islamic survivals. And in reality their pre-Islamic roots may be so remote as to have almost no significance. If, as in some cases these cults and their analogues may be, they are somewhere ultimately of pre-Islamic origin, then what we see in African Islam is a process of reactive counter diffusion in which, as the spirit of Islam flows in one direction, other spirits return the compliment. So, in effect, pre-Islamic becomes pan-Islam (Lewis, 1983: 78).

So closely interwoven may the two strands be - unorthodox and orthodox, mixed and reformed, or whatever pair of contrasting terms be chosen - that there is a kind of 'dual spiritual economy' with two interdependent branches (ibid.: 79). At the very end of his article Lewis stresses that even literate Islam contains an extensive written apparatus of magical and astrological Islamic lore which is regularly disseminated from urban centres of Muslim excellence. These not only provide an Islamic base and legitimation for pre-Islamic mystical beliefs and rituals, but actually sometimes introduce these which dilutes the unswerving eternal truth conserved in literate mainstream Islam, but also elements in literate

mainstream Islam which introduce and perpetuate alternative renderings of the Prophet's message. From the perspective of 'marginal Islam', Islam is not the 'Religion of the Book', but rather the religion of the Books, which facilitate the diffusion and re-diffusion of what often misleadingly pass as 'pre-Islamic' survivals [1983: 79-80].

Thus Lewis brings us to the threshold of the possibility of purely Islamic conflict over the proper understanding of the faith: but he seems strangely hesitant to step across the threshold. The 'unswerving eternal truth' surely exists, in a theological sense, but it is by no means unambiguously and unanimously expressed amongst all those champions of the warfare against 'magical beliefs' and 'marginal Islam': the same mystical brotherhoods which were the spearhead of West African Islamic reform in the nineteenth century may be dismissed by reformers in our own time as so corrupted by superstition and saint worship, so weighed down by the burden of medieval accretion, as to be unworthy of the name Muslim at all. Interaction is clearly not confined to the pre-Islamic Islamic format: it may occur, in a multitude of guises, within Islam itself. All this confirms, once more, the importance of the internal Muslim dynamic.

Returning to the urgency of distinguishing between 'mixing' and reformed Islam the dilemma which so much tormented Usman dan Fodio, I might almost say that this urgency is exactly what my model would lead one to expect: but that is hardly surprising, for the model itself derives from exactly this kind of evidence, collected cumulatively, and drawn from a wide span of historical time, from Ibn Battuta's Mali in the fourteenth century (and before that from al-Bakri's Ghana, at the time of the Norman conquest of England) down to discussion with those involved today, and in a wide variety of circumstances. (Similarly Horton, a scholar of immense experience, describes rather movingly how he likewise arrived at his two-tier structure, lesser spirits and supreme being, through 'a slow and painful process of induction' (1975: 220 n.).

A Christian Comparison

It is possible to treat Islam and Christianity as essentially in the same boat, as far as their development within black Africa is concerned. This is what the Intellectualist Theory does. And, clearly, in so far as the same African peoples, the same local 'basic cosmology' are influencing the development of the world religions in the new home which they share, then the evolution of these religions

is likely to be similar. What is in some ways the most striking thing about the comparison between Islam and Christianity in black Africa today, however, is their dissimilarity, and that particularly at the reform stage which has been the focus of our attention in much of this article. The reform tradition in Islam has pretty consistently looked to external models. In the early nineteenth century those models included the mystical brotherhoods. Today the brotherhoods are themselves the object of violent criticism by some contemporary reformers, whose standards are often those of the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia (see, for example, Hiskett, 1980: 126 ff.). On the other hand, the thrust of the most vigorous rethinking of Christian doctrine, both within black Africa and outside, is in our time towards a greater identification of the faith, a deeper rooting of it, within its African context: we no longer speak of Christian 'adaptation to' black Africa, but rather of 'incarnation within' black Africa. In terms of my model, Christian development omitted the 'mixing' stage, and that omission must now be rectified: the Christian reformers have the task of restoring the values of 'mixing'. In this polarised divergence, between modern Muslim and Christian reformers, in black Africa, we have I think further evidence that both these faiths are more than catalysts, that they do move under their own momentum.

Conclusion

The discussion between Horton and myself has now continued well over a decade: is it possible, yet, to see what the final outcome, even perhaps the final resolution, will be? At times I have despaired of any meeting of minds: when I found, for example, that even the reform movements, sometimes growing out of a local Islamic presence going back many centuries, were also to be classified as catalyst for changes that were 'in the air' anyway; it seemed to me that there was no chance at all of Horton ever making adequate allowances for the Islamic vitality inherent within the black African Muslim community. Harold Turner refers to 'studies based on a reductionist interpretation of the religious factor', which deny it 'a sui generis initiative and activity of its own', and he concludes pessimistically, 'with such we cannot engage in fruitful conversation'; (1967: 1, p. xiv). Much of Horton's argument, in our sequence of papers, does seem, in a way, to be of this reductionist kind. The examples of traditional societies moving into the macrocosm, marshalled in the first 'Rationality' paper, seem fundamentally intended to demonstrate that, given social, economic or political factors tending

towards the macrocosm, then attitudes to the supreme being will respond predictably: and the Islamic illustrations, in the second 'Rationality' paper, seem likewise designed to prove that Islamic development is also dependent upon such secular factors, '... we can, I think', he writes, 'discern a single broad theme of socio-political motivation' (1975: 388).

Yet, a basic ambiguity remains, it seems to me, in Horton's position. For it is not to these secular factors that he initially attributes the decisive influence moulding religious development. Let us look again at his original words, quoted early in this article, but now with my italics added: ... acceptance of Islamic or Christian patterns will be highly selective. Just what is accepted and what rejected will be largely determined by the structure of the 'basic cosmology' ... [1975: 220],

If Horton's view is that the 'basic cosmology' itself is determined by social, political, economic and other secular factors, then we are back in the reductionist impasse described in the previous paragraph. But his actual phrasing here seems to view the crucial role directly to the 'basic cosmology' itself: that is to say, to religion, religion is, after all, to be allowed 'a sui generis initiative and activity of its own', even if that initiative and activity can only be liberated, so to speak, through the right microcosm/macrocosm relationship, and even if it is the 'basic cosmology' much more than Islam (or Christianity) which is allowed such liberty. If I am right in my understanding of Horton here, then he and I are agreed on the basic 'sui generis initiative and activity' of religion, however cramped and restricted that freedom may be. What divides us is not a great gulf fixed, across which we 'cannot engage in fruitful conversation'; what divides us, perhaps, is basically the difference in the focal points of our consideration of religious development. Horton seems to begin his exposition from within the African microcosm, and I, perhaps, from within the quarantined pioneer Islamic presence. So whereas my chief complaint is that Horton neglects, within Islam, those very qualities of initiative and activity which he is so zealous to defend within the 'basic cosmology', Horton's chief complaint, or one of them, anyway, is that, contrariwise, in my concentration upon Islam I do not do justice to that 'basic cosmology'. Hence his claim that I regard the indigenous religions as 'essentially static', and his apparent implication that I regard the pre-Muslim, or pre-Christian, religious situation in black Africa as 'a tabula rasa automatically registering the imprint of external cultural influences' (Horton, 1975: 221). But I hope it is clear,

from what has preceded, that the entire *raison d'être* of my 'mixing' stage is that the earlier heritage is carried over. Even the reform stage can never be fully rootless in this sense: indeed, Christian attention nowadays to 'incarnation within' Africa explicitly emphasises the persistent importance of that heritage.

There is continuing religious dialogue, with both sides, the local and that of the world religions, actively involved. Perhaps the ultimate reconciliation of the two views, Horton's and mine, will be found in an analysis which adequately allows for religious preservation, initiative and change, both locally and within the world religions, and within the dialogue between them. I must learn to live with the Phoenix of the traditional heritage, and Horton with the Juggernaut of the Islamic.

That my model, with its strong stress upon the ineradicable tenacity of the local religious heritage throughout the 'mixing' stage (a tenacity so resolute that in the end surgical excision by holy war seemed to the militant reformers the only solution), should be criticised for regarding the local religious setting as a *tabula rasa* automatically registering external influences is a good example of the potential perils of communication: what is written, and intended, to mean one thing is read and understood as meaning quite another. I have tried hard not to misrepresent Horton's own arguments; assuredly I have not fully succeeded, and I regret any shortcomings in this respect.

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CHRISTIANITY AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN AFRICA

By Richard Gray

Just as African Christian leaders are being challenged to react to the plight and problems of the underprivileged majority, so are scholars summoned to reassess the concerns and cosmologies of the masses. The greatest single step in this reassessment has been the realisation that African religions are not closed, static systems, impervious to change. With their eclectic insistence on practical results, African religions have been flexible, open to innovation and thoroughly capable of assimilating new concepts. In the absence of literacy, this process of religious change was often almost imperceptible and unrecorded, but the investigations carried out over the last fifteen years have firmly established this characteristic of many African religious traditions. The implications of this for the study of Christianity in Africa are very considerable. If the possibility of change within both the African traditions and Christianity in Africa is taken seriously, then attention is naturally focused on the process of interaction between these religions and the directions of change within both religious systems.

One of the most sophisticated and influential attempts to examine some of these implications has been that of Professor Horton. Placing almost the whole of his emphasis on the potential of change within African religions, Horton has argued that what had seemed to be perhaps the most dramatic element in African conversion to Christianity, the replacement of the old spirits and gods by the belief in the High God, should now be seen primarily as a logical response of traditional religion to the expansion of scale, to the transformation of the narrow, local viewpoints of small communities by the wider horizons brought to Africa by the revolution in communications. Indeed, in Horton's scheme, the world religions of Christianity and Islam are very nearly reduced 'to the role of catalysts i.e., stimulators and accelerators of changes which were 'in the air' anyway'. This is not the occasion to question the strengths of Horton's particular argument concerning the place of the High God vis-a-vis the local spirits, but a historian, whether or not he belongs to what Horton terms 'the devout opposition', is, I think, likely to suspect any thesis that claims to provide 'an overall causal explanation' of a phenomenon as complex as conversion in Africa. We are deeply indebted to Horton for his decisive demonstration of the need to investigate the dynamics of religious change in Africa, but his

approach would seem to overlook the possibility that the world religions may have introduced completely new concepts to the African religious repertory. By querying one of his initial assumptions and by concentrating on one or two of his more questionable assertions, we would seek to direct attention to some rather neglected aspects of the debate on the still developing process of Christianisation in Africa. Is it, for instance, correct to assume that increased attention to the High God is the most notable feature of African responses to Christianity?

One of the most obvious aspects of African encounters with Christianity has involved beliefs concerning life after death. Professor Mbiti's study is justly well known but it is surprising how few other scholars have followed his lead, and that the relevance of eschatology to the debate on conversion has so far been overlooked. Yet, even the most superficial survey of missionary literature will produce illustrations of the impact of Christian eschatology on African cosmologies and on the imagination of African individuals.

Some anthropologists have emphasised the fear and horror which death held for some African peoples:

Nuer avoid as far as possible speaking of death and when they have to do so they speak about it in such a way as to leave no doubt that they regard it as the most dreadful of all dreadful things. This horror of death fits in with their almost total lack of eschatology. Theirs is a this-worldly religion, a religion of abundant life and the fullness of days, and they neither pretend to know, nor, I think, do they care, what happens to them after death (Evans-Pritchard, 1956: 154).

This fear and horror, however, should be placed in perspective by the successful balance achieved by most African societies in their relationship to the ancestors, so that in traditional Africa death was often seen as an opportunity to strengthen life. But whether death was viewed with horror or accepted triumphantly, there was a relative paucity in African cosmologies of speculations concerning the nature of life after death. And even where there were fairly clear ideas about the after life, where the village of the ancestors was seen as a highly desirable 'continuation of life on earth without any of the worries, trouble or afflictions that mar this world', the enjoyment by the soul of this future life was recognised to be extremely tenuous, dependent as it was on the periodic acts of remembrance by its descendants at ancestral shrines. The probable final end of man was thus to pass into the collective obscurity of forgotten spirits. The insistence of the Christian

catechism on 'the fear of hell and the beauty of heaven', the two aspects most emphasised, for instance, in the Ganda catechism of 1881, was reinforced by the confessional, where impenitents could again be reminded of the pains of hell. It was reiterated in much early missionary preaching, and was proclaimed, perhaps most cogently, by the calm heroic deaths of so many pioneer missionaries. All this presented an immense challenge to most African peoples. Often, as Mbiti argues, the Christian eschatological symbolism has been presented in such a way that it has been interpreted at a literal level inducing a psychological escape to a dream land, and the prevalence of millenarian expectations among the first generation of Christian converts has been widely recognised.

Yet, even where African reactions have not taken millenarian forms, the evidence suggests that the impact of Christian eschatology has been widespread and profound. We are told, for instance, that among Ganda Catholics 'prayers to and for the dead and the baptising of the dying to assure them of heaven, had a great appeal to the convert'. A young Alur chief, Okelo of Panyamure, noted by a pioneer Verona Father as the area's most assiduous catechumen, explained his motives as follows: 'my father is dead and I do not know where he is now; but I, when I die, want to go to heaven'; and an early CMS missionary remarked in Buganda that 'the idea of everlasting life appeals to them, their life here being so uncertain'. It is notoriously difficult for a historian to identify religious motivations, especially when he is dependent largely on the reports of alien observers. Yet these impressions of the importance of Christian eschatology are powerfully reinforced by the evidence of at least one social anthropologist. 'Again and again we were told by Christians: "We do not fear death as the pagans do"', reports Monica Wilson of her experiences among the Nyakyusa in the 1930s. The supreme attraction, mentioned again and again as the reason for conversion, is: 'There is life' (ubumi bulipo), and it is life in a world to come rather than 'more abundant life' here and now that is spoken of. The later theological emphasis on realised eschatology had not apparently influenced these early converts. The appeal and impact of early missionary teaching rested, therefore, not merely on the changes and chances of this mortal life but on the fact that it involved a cosmological revolution. Suddenly the hereafter was no longer a faint reflection of this world, no longer was it primarily concerned with the community's survival, no longer would it slip imperceptibly into the forgotten past. The Bible brought to its African readers the idea of history as progress, the concept of linear

rather than cyclical time, and with this was linked a liberating yet frightening emphasis on the individual. Many other factors have, of course, heightened the emphasis on the ego and it would be quite false to suggest that African responses to Christian eschatology have been taking place in a vacuum, that they have not been accompanied and affected by many other social and economic factors, still less that they have been confined to the narrow orthodox ranks of Christian 'converts'. But when examining this major transformation of ideas in Africa it is difficult to believe that these African responses were "in the air" anyway. Rather, it would seem that Christian eschatology was almost completely unexpected and that its introduction in areas unaffected by Islam posed a fundamentally novel, and in some ways perhaps a decisive, challenge to the cosmologies of many African peoples.

In most other aspects of its encounter with African thought, Christianity may well have had much less of a strangely distinctive, revolutionary impact. Indeed, one of the most fruitful recent studies has explored the way in which Christianity and traditional beliefs have interacted to produce a complementary pattern of ideas and responses in which varied spiritual needs are currently satisfied. In assessing the nature, and even more the direction, of this interaction, however, one must again pause when confronted with Horton's assertion that 'just what is accepted and what rejected will be largely determined by the structure of the 'basic cosmology', and by the limits which this structure imposes on the cosmology's potential for social change'. Let me illustrate my disagreement with such an interpretation by referring to some recent data concerning Christian influences on African approaches to the problem of witchcraft. At first the Christian message of salvation was often interpreted in terms almost exclusively determined by traditional concepts, and a proclamation of the Gospel was sometimes taken literally to provide an infallible cure for witchcraft. Thus Tomo Nyirenda, a finder and killer of witches, could appear to the Lala as 'before all else the bearer of Christianity ... a Mission like any other'. If, however, we look at the response not of the first generation but of our contemporaries a very different picture emerges. Take, for instance, the data recently published by Professor Pauw concerning Xhosa attitudes to witchcraft. Pauw himself sees the continuance of beliefs in witchcraft as evidence of the intermediate nature of contemporary Xhosa society, poised between his understanding of 'Christianity' and the traditional world. Yet the important fact is not that most Xhosa Christians

continue to believe in witchcraft, but that they are effecting radical changes within this sector of belief which they share with non-Christian Xhosa, with the result that the implications of witchcraft and the response to it are being drastically transformed. A distinct majority of Xhosa Christians now have recourse to prayer when confronted by witchcraft, and this reliance on prayer rather than on traditional diviners powerfully contributes to the fact that today, partly on account of Christian attitudes, witches and sorcerers are increasingly left unidentified even by traditional diviners. The fears associated with witchcraft beliefs may still be prevalent, but specific accusations of witchcraft, with their traumatic social consequences, would seem to be radically declining. It is also significant that iNdaba zoSindiso, the prayer movement led by the late Mam Paul, evoked a wide response among 'Red' or 'pagan' Xhosa. Other factors have influenced the decline in specific witchcraft accusations. Government legislation made them illegal, and in urban and plural societies, where social tensions are often more impersonal, explicit accusations would tend in any case to be rare: witchcraft being attributed anonymously to evil strangers. But faced with a complex interaction such as this, in which new religious insights are slowly influencing and even transforming a whole aspect of ancient belief, it is surely a little premature to assert that the direction of religious change is being largely determined 'by the structure of the traditional cosmology'.

So far, in reaction to Horton, I have insisted on the contributions brought by a world religion to Africa. I do not, however, wish to leave the impression that in this encounter the flow of ideas has always been merely in one direction nor that Africa has in any way been a purely passive recipient. Let me therefore mention briefly another set of recent studies which give details of a far more positive African contribution. Traditional African solutions to the problem of evil and suffering have by no means been confined to a concern with witchcraft. They have also included a whole variety of appeals for spiritual help in the ministry of healing. Within the Christian context, these appeals have been voiced most confidently and persistently by those churches which have developed independently of Western missionary control, though, as Bishop Sundkler has reminded us, the influence of Western Pentecostalism on this development has not been inconsiderable. One of the great contributions of the major sympathetic studies of these churches which have appeared in the last decade has been to document this dimension of their activities at the same time as demonstrating the

authentic nature of their experience of Christ. For us in the West, this may prove but the first major occasion for African Christianity to proclaim its universal relevance and to challenge that emphasis on technology so beloved in recent centuries by the West.

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LEZA INTO GOD — GOD INTO LEZA

By Elizabeth Colson

When Dr Brendan Carmody asked me to speak to you, it was an opportunity to reach a Zambian audience once again. Much of my early research based on Southern Province was published in Zambia, but for many years now, due to economic difficulties affecting the University of Zambia, I have been unable to publish in Zambia where my research on Zambia would be available to Zambians. A Zambian said to me recently, “What use is all your work to us if it is not available here? What is the point of it all?” This gathering gives me the opportunity to speak to an informed critical audience of my work on Tonga religious thought, one focus of on-going research which now covers fifty-five years.

It is appropriate that I speak on Tonga religion for two reasons. First, Dr Carmody’s invitation came from the Religious Studies Unit; what other subject could I choose? Secondly, Tonga religious ideas and practices have engaged my interest since my first months in Butonga. As I have probed more deeply, I have become ever more impressed with the solutions Tonga thinkers have found for the great problems of existence which all religions face: why are we here? How did all this come to be? Why life and death? and Why should there be suffering as well as joy and happiness?

My first substantial publication was an article on rain shrines and the *basangu*, the spirits associated with such shrines and with matters that affected communities living together on the land (1948). Later I wrote on the role of the *mizimo*, the spirits of the dead, in the ordering of the lives of their kin (1954). I have also written on the *masabe*, spirits causing affliction to individuals who must come to terms with their own encounters with new and disturbing experiences (1969, 1977). But only incidentally have I written of *Leza*, the creator and also the guardian of continuity and order.

Why the first should be last is due to many reasons. All who have written of the meaning of *Leza*; C.R. Hopgood (1950), John Milimo (n.d.), Father Edwin Flynn (n.d.), and Ulrich Luig (1997); have faced difficulties, for Tonga conceptions of the nature of *Leza* have been shifting as we questioned and wrote, as people thought and rethought their experience which included exposure to missions and mission schools. One result was that ideas about *Leza* were becoming more firmly linked

with Christian definitions of God. Only *Leza* of all the spiritual forces recognised by the Tongas was acceptable to the missionaries who chose *Leza* as the Tonga term for God. The existence of *basangu*, *mizimo*, *masabe* was denied by the churches, or they were recognised only as demons to be combated, servants of Satan (a spiritual force previously outside Tonga experience). Only *Leza*, in the guise of the Christian God, has been absorbed into the dogmas of *Zambian Christianity*.

Trying to study concepts that are changing rapidly is never easy. People disagree. There is much uncertainty. But it was also difficult to fathom the nature of *Leza* because *Leza* dwelt in the minds of the people while ritual focused on other forms of spirit. One could attend consultations with *basangu* and the rituals at community shrines and people could describe what should be done there. One could be present at divinations when the *mizimo* were consulted and attend offerings poured to acknowledge their continued power over the living and hear the words with which they were addressed. One could watch *masabe* victims and adepts enact the nature of the possessing spirit in the dance drama associated with it. But there was no place, no occasion, where one could see and hear people engaged with *Leza*. *Leza* had no shrines, no priests, received no visible offerings. People related to *Leza* on a personal, intellectual and emotional level.

In the absence of a priesthood, there was also the absence of authorised dogma. About *Leza*, and much else, no one set of beliefs had been formulated to which everyone was expected to adhere. Often I have thought that people did not care what others believed as long as they did the right thing at the right time and place. Finally the Tonga did not personify or make representations of *Leza* or any other spiritual force. They made no masks, effigies or paintings. There was nothing to encourage them to think of *Leza* in material form.

This may have been made easier because *ciTonga*, like all Bantu languages, does not use gender as a grammatical category. In this it is unlike English and other Indo-European languages which force their speakers to specify gender. In English, God must be designated by 'he', 'she', or 'it'. We have no choice. In *ciTonga*, one speaks of *Leza* using grammatical forms appropriate for humans and powerful animals. In the 1940s when I asked about *Leza*, people denied that *Leza* was either male or female or that they knew what *Leza* looked like. They commonly responded to my probing with an anthology: '*Leza* is like wind. We do not know what wind is. We feel wind on our bodies. We see trees bend. We know it by what it does.'

I have still heard this from a few elderly people who hold on to the belief that *Leza* is unknowable to human beings. They deny that *Leza* ever speaks directly to people through any prophet or medium though as long ago as 1963 I met a prophet who claimed that her possessing spirit was that of God or *Leza*, and since then I have met others. The spread of Pentecostalism, no doubt, has encouraged the acceptance that *Leza* may speak directly to humans through humans.

If *Leza* could be known only through actions, through effects, what actions were attributed to *Leza*? Illness and death were usually attributed to the spirits of the dead or to *masabe* or to witchcraft controlled by humans, usually men, who acted from self-interest or malice. *Leza* was not an alternative considered during divining sessions. Drought and other community afflictions were attributed to angry *basangu* or to witchcraft. *Leza* was invoked as an explanation in such matters only if all others failed. Then people said, '*Leza*, what else?' or '*Leza* laughed.' This was an admission that the matter was beyond human understanding, that it could not be rectified by any human action. One could reconcile oneself with the *basangu*, the *mizimo* and the *masabe* because communication existed between them and people. This was not true of *Leza* who seemed to operate primarily at the cosmic level.

John Milimo (n.d.) and C.R. Hopgood (1950) tried to probe the significance of *Leza* by paying close attention to praise-names and to references to *Leza* in proverbs, seeing these as encapsulations of earlier thought. Here *Leza*'s primary role is that of creator signaled by the praise name, *Mulenga*, from the verb '*ku-lenga*'. I have been told that this verb should be used only with *Leza* although recently I have heard people use *kulenga* in speaking of human action. In the past, only *Leza* could create. People could alter what is given by *Leza*: carve wood, mould clay, forge iron. They work within the nature of what they have. *Leza* in creating gave each thing or type of thing its unique qualities, its essential character. In a sense these are eternal, like Platonic forms, although particular embodiments are transitory. Much time and intellectual effort went into trying to discover the essential nature of things, the powers and possibilities inherent in soils, plants, animals, which had been given them by *Leza*. The knowledge gained by close observation and experimentation is truly impressive.

People, like all other phenomena, were created with particular attributes including a way of life. Some said that *Leza* created the clan system, the *mikowa*, simultaneously with human beings who came into existence already ordered into

clans, regarded as the enduring units of human society. Therefore, *Leza* stood behind the *mizimo* or ancestors as a guarantor of the rightness of a way of life seen as a continuation of the life laid down for the first men and women.

The creation was seen as an intentional act, but people said nothing or little of why it was done. To ask why was to presume to know the mind or purpose of *Leza*. Certainly creation was not seen as leading to some further end. There was no expectation that the world would be destroyed or change in any radical fashion. Merely that life would go on under conditions imposed during creation. After that *Leza* withdrew from active involvement with the material world.

The Tonga were well aware that they lived in a physical and social world inhabited by transient individuals; trees, animals, people. Even rivers changed their courses. But the transience of individuals was offset by the permanence of the system within which they did not control and could not alter. They were well aware of how minimal their efforts to change their environment were against the overwhelming order of nature as created by *Leza*. Today we live largely in environments dominated by human activity manifest in buildings, roads, cleared fields, dammed rivers, deforestation, the blurring of the air itself. Tonga religious thought as I have been describing it, originated under very different conditions. Of course, people have been altering the African landscape for a very long time, ever since they gained control of fire, but until recently with minimal effect. In this part of Africa fields once cleared reverted to bush. Homesteads decayed and needed rebuilding within a few years when usually a move was made to a new site and the old became field or bush. Shrines were small and impermanent. Villages formed, broke up, reformed. Kinship groups might disappear. And always the bush pressed close around settlement and people were aware that they shared the world with animals, birds, plants and other phenomena with their own characteristics over which they had little or no control. In contrast, *Leza* had both created and instituted an order that maintained the totality.

The rightness of all this must have been impressed upon those puzzling over the meaning of it all by the fact that their world was beautiful and if all went well, as they thought *Leza* had probably intended, it provided for their needs and gave them moments of great happiness, perhaps even a sense of oneness. The significance of our dependency on and the joy one derives from nature are things I think about when staying in villages and forget when in Lusaka or other engineered environments.

Since the natural order was created by *Leza*, it is logical to conclude that *Leza* is basically beneficent. The world itself is therefore what *Leza* did and does, the actions through which the Tonga knew *Leza*. Again the praise names collected by Milimo and Hopgood give evidence of this. When they do not refer to the act of creation itself, they focus on some aspect of nature, the continuity and inevitability of the season for the importance of water and fertility. Some natural phenomena were directly linked to *Leza*, especially those associated with the sky and air: meteorites are ‘the spear of *Leza*’, lightning ‘*Leza* flashes’, rain, ‘*Leza* falls’. But here they dealt with metaphor; linking *Leza* with things of power. Despite the emphasis on the sky, people thought me foolish to ask where *Leza* lives. That was a very European question.

This leads to another point. In thinking, including thinking about new phenomena such as the odd ways of strangers, we rely both upon the resources of our language and our experience of how our social world is ordered. Both provide us with ready-made categories through which we try to understand the new and unfamiliar or the difficult to conceptualise. As John Milimo has said, ‘God’s power is expressed in images and metaphors which associate with the most powerful things people knew. It is rarely abstract’ (n.d.: 4-5).

Ideas about power are strongly affected by the political system under which we live and by the actions of their representatives. European ideas about God reflect the long dominance of imperial or royal courts centred on a ruler often claiming arbitrary power, commanding military forces, attended by hierarchies or officials offering fulsome praise, set off and isolated by ritual and much expensive grandeur. They addressed their God as ‘Lord’, ‘King of Kings’, ‘Commander of the heavenly host’; treated him as a royal person; and encouraged him to lead the battle against the foe, whoever that might be.

The Tonga formulated their conception of *Leza* under different circumstances. They had little appreciation of hierarchy, placed high value on personal autonomy, and practised participatory democracy. Just as they did not attribute gender to *Leza*, so they did not associate *Leza* with political office. *Leza* neither ruled, led in battle, nor judged. The world having been created ruled itself according to the original plan. Plants, animals and people were expected to get on with their lives. What happened after death had very little to do with how one had lived; those who died joined their dead to become *mizimo* in their turn.

The weak point in all this was that if *Leza* is good and made a good world, why

then do people face so much suffering? People looked into their own hearts and found the answer. They had the potential for evil because they fostered self-interest and malice. Power inherent in natural substances could be converted to enhance their own power and advance their desires. For this they did not blame *Leza*, but rather the human witches who acted of their own volition and independently.

By the time I came to Southern Province in 1946, concepts of *Leza*, developed on the basis of evidence provided by a natural and social order which had once seemed permanent, were already in question. Encounter with Christian conceptions of God was only one element in the intellectual revolution that put in jeopardy much that once could be taken for granted. The next fifty years proved even more revolutionary. Nature itself has been transformed as game has been shot out, fields became permanent, and people began to build in materials that survive. Dependence on the resources of one's own immediate locale has been shattered and people more and more rely on what they obtain in transactions mediated through money. Action has become enmeshed within a political order which seeks to control and direct using a hierarchy of office. People do not expect to be able to live as their ancestors did, nor do they necessarily want to. Much of the impetus of Zambian life in the last half century has come from the determination shown by many Zambians to escape the rural areas and past limitations on action. Society has been differentiated. Even close kin have different jobs, different lifestyles, different expectations of the future. Children do not look to their parents to see what they themselves will become, nor do they think their parents' knowledge essential or reliable. This all has had enormous consequences on how one views the world.

Once one knew *Leza* through one's knowledge of the world, but the world that *Leza* was once thought to have created and left in working order has been more or less destroyed. Nevertheless, over the years, increasingly I have heard the people of Southern Province refer to *Leza*. Sometimes this has been in the old terms, "What else but *Leza*?" or "*Leza* laughed." But increasingly they have used new forms of address and reference. Apparently through the chaos of the twentieth century, here as in Europe and America, there has been a search for new conceptions that give reassurance that life has meaning in a world of rapid change, dominated by humans who set no limits to their ambitions. Indeed, humans are now said to create, pre-empting a right once monopolised by *Leza*. One still hears *Leza* praise as "*Mulenga*", "Creator", but more commonly it is

as “Father *Leza*” or “*Mwami* (chief) *Leza*”, personifying and personalising what was once unknowable into a gendered divinity patterned on a patriarchal father figure who should listen to the appeal of his children or on a political leadership which should respond to its subjects. Both signal that *Leza* is now conceived as directly involved in daily life. People say, “If *Leza* helps, she will recover”, “If she has luck, *Leza* will cure”. In this guise, *Leza* now receives prayers and offerings during church services and is identified with shrines. One very obvious feature of the present Zambian landscape is the prevalence of church buildings, erected to the glory of *Leza* or God and to demonstrate the loyalty and devotion of his followers. But where once all in the same community gathered at the same shrine or set of shrines, now they go their separate ways to churches which claim unique knowledge of God and what he wants of people. This caters to the new social differentiations so characteristic now in Zambia. People are different. They go their separate ways but they seek solace from the knowledge that they have a personal god to whom they can turn for help and guidance.

What has not happened until recently, was recognition of one aspect of the Christian God; that God is conceived as a Trinity, as existing in three persons. As *Leza* was transformed into God, it was very much the God of the early chapters of the Old Testament, who was also creator, who spoke out of the storm and fire. What was new was the continued involvement in what happened on earth and continued direct communication through chosen people. People rarely spoke of Jesus, though the role of healer aroused their interest. I suspect that they considered him a prophet or medium rather than a unique manifestation of God. His death and resurrection left them sceptical. Only in the last few years has this changed and in the last decade I have begun to hear Jesus invoked in much the same terms as people use in evoking *Mwami Leza*. But I do not think that *Leza* would ever be used as a translation for Jesus, though here I may be wrong. Very recently people have begun to ask me if I believed in the ‘second coming’, and a few have indicated that it is *Leza* who is to come. Nevertheless I think for most people *Leza* remains unique and to the extent that ideas about *Leza* have influenced Tonga concepts about God, God has become again the God of the Old Testament.

People have also begun to talk more of Satan, a new concept but one used to provide a leader for the battalions who now battle with God for the souls of people. The battalions are composed of human witches as well as unbelievers and of demons; the latter including *mizimo* and *basangu* which once aided as well as

troubled people. But *Leza* having been identified with God is not of the battalion. People continue to see *Leza* as benevolent, but now also a judge concerned with how people live, as a chief who hands out favours to those who delight him, and as a patriarch who give orders.

But as I said earlier, there are still a few Tonga who say, 'We cannot know *Leza*; *Leza* is like wind. We know wind by what it does. We do not see it or know what it is.' In other words they remain sceptical that *Leza* conforms to human patterns or is answerable to human desires.

For them to translate God into *Leza* would require major adjustments. God would need to shed personification in human form and with it gender, and become once more truly transcendent, without particular form, unknowable, but still the guarantor of eternal verities. But that is hardly possible when there is no agreement about just such things as eternal verities.

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CONVERSION AND SCHOOL AT CHIKUNI, 1905-39

By Brendan Carmody

Introduction

Religious conversion, a concept central to missionary activity and to the influence that Christianity has exerted in a variety of fields, embodies a wide range of meanings. In the African context it has generally meant a change from a traditional to a universal religion, entailing a psychological transformation through which the convert's underlying assumptions about the world are reconstructed, accompanied by a socially recognised display of change. Robin Horton, among others, has devoted scholarly attention to the conversion process from the viewpoint of the Africans undergoing conversion but the missionaries, the advocates of conversion, have received no comparable attention.

This article aims to present an integral perspective on the history of conversion at the Chikuni Mission, southern Zambia, where conversion to Catholicism embodied a minimal degree of psychological transformation in that baptism frequently followed upon some basic instructions in Catholic dogma and moral theology with little attention being devoted to the experience of God's gift of grace. Although baptism indicated membership of the Roman Catholic Church, the missionaries envisaged a gradual growth in conversion after baptism on the part of their converts which was, from the missionaries' viewpoint, manifested in the reception of the other sacraments. Marriage, Confirmation, frequent reception of the Eucharist and Penance, Extreme Unction and burial in the mission cemetery constituted some of the main socially recognised displays of full-scale acceptance of Catholicism. The approach adopted in this case study will include Horton's hypothesis in order to discuss the African experience but will also focus selectively on the missionaries' ideology and background so as to understand how such factors coloured the experience of conversion at Chikuni. A central hypothesis of this study is that the Chikuni converts chose to become Catholics initially principally because of the socio-cultural inducements which the mission presented. In itself the religious message of the missionaries appeared unattractive, foreign, paradoxical and demanded a long period for assimilation.

Jesuit Perspectives on African Conversion

The Jesuits, a Roman Catholic religious order, founded by St Ignatius of Loyola

in the sixteenth century, pioneered missions to spread the gospel in places as diverse as India, Japan, China, North and South America. In 1877, at the request of Bishop Ricards of Grahamstown, South Africa, the Jesuits assumed responsibility for the Zambezi Mission, a large territory stretching from South Africa into present-day Congo (formerly known as Zaire). Subsequently they set up mission stations at Chishawasha, near present-day Harare, Gwelo, Umtali and Victoria in what is today Zimbabwe. The main purpose of the Zambezi Mission was to 'convert' the peoples of southern Africa, which essentially meant the acceptance of all that Christianity implies in the formation of the convert's life. The Zambezi Mission attributed a very significant role to the school in the conversion process.

Tongaland at the Time of the Jesuits' Advent

In the 1900s the political entity we know today as 'the Tonga' did not exist. Whatever ethnic unity existed centred on the religious figure of the rainmaker-prophet, Monze. After initial contact with the Europeans in the 1880s, many Tonga emigrated to the south in search of wage employment. The introduction of a hut tax by the British South Africa Company in 1904 exacerbated the need for cash. Moreover, following the construction of the railway through Tongaland in 1905, the sale of local commodities as well as migration for wage employment was enhanced. Referring to the social significance of the introduction of the railway to Tongaland, Vickery contends: 'Its construction was the most prophetic event in Tonga economic history, a harbinger and symbol of change which reshaped Tonga life in fundamental and lasting ways' (1978: 56). Partly at the request of Cecil Rhodes, the head of the British South Africa Company, two French Jesuits, Frs Peter Prestage and Joseph Moreau, undertook to expand the Zambezi Mission north of the Zambezi river. Having gained the confidence of Monze, in the course of their 1902 expedition, Fr Moreau was enabled to return three years later with another fellow Frenchman, Fr Jules Torrend, and four local boys who had accompanied Moreau and Prestage earlier to Empandeni, then Southern Rhodesia. Moreau's main purpose in returning to Tongaland was to open a mission station there. As part of the Zambezi Mission enterprise Moreau founded what later came to be called the Chikuni Mission in 1905. The Mission's central aim was to enlighten the darkness of heathenism and to make Christians of the Batonga.

Hortons's Hypothesis and Chikuni Conversion

As already implied, when Moreau and his companions arrived in Tongaland in 1905 Tonga society was already in a state of transition. Historical events such as migration and the introduction of the railway had created disequilibrium, while the old socio-cultural system no longer operated effectively as a stabiliser. Such a social situation involving dramatic improvements in communication accompanied by economic and political developments approximate Horton's conditions for significant religious change. Since Horton's thesis on religious change has been widely published and debated, a summary will be sufficient. According to Horton, the qualities attributed to the supernatural entities in a religious system are analogous to the scope of the human world over which those entities hold sway. In traditional African societies, much of the explanatory power of religion centred on the lesser spirits (ancestors, spirits of the wild). More formidable spirits were proper to the larger organisational complexes, including states, trade networks and towns, the macrocosm. In typical African cosmology, a two-tiered arrangement emerged where the daily life of individuals was largely contained within the microcosm which the lesser spirits administered and where the notion of the supreme being tended to be vague and poorly developed. With increased trade and contact with the outside world, spirits of the macrocosm tended to take the place of the lesser spirits, since, in Horton's view, African religion is primarily an instrument by which people interpret the world (1971: 94-5). Thus as people became more involved in the social life beyond the local community they tended to evolve a moral code for governance of the wider circle. Since the supreme being transcended the boundaries of the microcosm, he was seen to underpin the universalist moral code. As a social group reached such a stage in cosmological thinking it is probable that they would convert or adapt to a universalist religion such as Christianity or Islam. A person engaged in the modern sectors of society is more likely to think in terms of macrocosmic spirit, than one who is not. In such circumstances where many are becoming engaged in the activities of the macrocosm, acceptance of Christianity could be as much the result of development within traditional cosmology (in response to certain social changes) as it could be the result of any missionary evangelisation.

Many have criticised Horton's theory. From the perspective of Chikuni, it is difficult to discover the degree to which the Tonga had moved towards thinking in terms of macrocosmic spirits at the time of the Jesuits' arrival. We know,

however, that Moreau and the first Jesuits at the Mission had little hesitation about identifying *Leza*, the traditional Tonga word for God, with the Christian God. To what extent the emergence of the traditional concept, *Leza*, can be linked with the growth of the macrocosm or how ‘universal’ *Leza* became in Tonga minds remains unclear. What appears true is that, while the Tonga concept of God and associated religious thinking expanded, because of socio-cultural factors, this did not necessarily mean that they had to choose to become either Catholics or Seventh Day Adventists, the two kinds of Christianity open to them here. Their conversion, and their choice of which kind of Christianity to adopt, remained a highly selective process and, at least in the Chikuni context, was dictated primarily by socio-cultural factors, not by the intrinsic explanatory power of the new message nor by developments within the traditional cosmology.

Employment, not Catholicism

When Fr Moreau established his mission on the banks of the Magoye river in July 1905, one of his first tasks entailed winning the confidence of the chief, headmen, and elders of the area. Moreau judged that he could best do this by introducing the plough, not initially by preaching. Although Moreau himself did not appear to see any major conflict between spending most of his day instructing people how to plough with oxen and his priestly vocation, he was very conscious of the need for conversions. As far as he could see, one of the best ways of interesting people in the mission was by offering employment. Lack of sustained interest in school and what it had to offer, including its religious message, continued to be a source of concern to the missionaries during the first twenty years. During these early years almost all the converts were youths who had been employed on the mission or who had, as mission wage-earners, attended school. Of the 1908 group of converts, sixteen young men (all of whom had been mission employees) who had been boarding here for a long time were baptised. In similar fashion, when St Joseph’s, the new teachers’ training school, opened in 1926, its first fifteen students had all worked on the farm and had attended evening classes.

School: A Means to Wage Employment

Before 1926 Fr Moreau refused to teach the students who came to the mission any English, which caused them much frustration. Even at that time English was perceived by locals as the key means of entry to the white people’s world of paid

labour, especially as nearby Livingstone was then the capital.

From the beginning of the mission's history the out-schools or schools away from the main mission, acted as key outposts for missionary outreach. Some of the earliest out-schools were established at Hanamaila, about three miles from the mission, at Chipembere, eight miles distant, and at St Mary's, Monze, fifteen miles away. Initial success in attracting members to such centres was followed by difficulties in maintaining regular attendance. This experience remained common even beyond the 1930s, when Fr Zabdyr and his assistants, the Jeanes supervisors, Antonio Monze and Paul Hakola, spent much time persuading villagers to send their children to school.

Such lack of interest in schooling had a number of explanations. Among the most obvious was the traditional practice of cattle herding for boys and early marriage for girls. Since girls would marry young, it was seen to be unnecessary and uneconomical to send them to school. Less obvious but perhaps no less significant was the fact that English was taught only after two years of schooling. The perception of Africans with regard to the utility of English was accurate, for, as was true in other areas of Africa, the reward system favoured the white-collar jobs which had hitherto been reserved almost exclusively for Europeans. It did not equally reward manual occupations, which both missionaries and government officials lauded.

In Northern Rhodesia one needed English to begin teacher training after 1931. Such careers as those of police officer, detective or signaller required Standard III by 1937. This meant that a person needed to have three or four years' English before he or she could get any reasonably remunerative employment. Medical orderlies, the postal service and clerks needed Standard VI. Furthermore, by the mid-1930s, education beyond Standard VI became possible for a lucky few.

In contrast to the earlier years of the mission's life, from 1926 onward students came freely to Chikuni Mission's School, principally, it would appear, because of the opportunity it offered them to learn English. After the opening of St Joseph's training school English became a core, compulsory subject in the curriculum and somewhat later Harold Consterdine, a Cambridge graduate in English, became Chikuni's main English teacher.

Jesuit Schools: Baptism

With the advent of more youths to the mission to receive education and thereby

enhance their chances of getting higher-paid jobs, these youths were expected to attend religious instructions and services, which usually led to baptism. This is not to imply that there was no respect for students' personal freedom at Chikuni, even if that freedom seemed ambiguous.

The school's daily round was so designed as to create a Catholic atmosphere where, though free to participate or not, a person was subject to penalty if he deviated. One might say that Chikuni missionaries employed group-directed tactics focusing on the creation of a climate for conversion so that, while theoretically conversion remained an individual's free decision, it was facilitated, perhaps at times dictated, by structural and group pressures. Consequently, when whole sections of the school formed part of the catechumenate, structural incentives to become Catholic may have been as powerful as the conscious reflection of individuals. This seems especially likely in a preponderantly oral society where a sense of the individual seemed poorly developed.

Thus, at Chikuni, youths seeking employment and access to wage employment constituted the main body of converts, those who overtly chose to become Catholics. In this context where Catholicism (and not Seventh Day Adventists) was the choice, Caroline Ifeka-Moller's emphasis on social-structural incentives to religious change seems to offer more explanatory power than Horton's intellectualist perspective. Ifeka-Moller demonstrates how, in the context of eastern Nigeria, social rather than intellectual factors explain conversion to Christianity and the Aladura churches. Similarly, F.K. Ekechi (1971), identified the significant role of education in the movement to conversion when, for local people, the acquisition of Western-type education provided the *sine qua non* of personal betterment in terms of enabling young men to become clerks, engineers and teachers as well as opponents of colonialism.

Catholicism: Older Generations

Since the older generation perceived few advantages for themselves in becoming Catholics, at Chikuni few of them converted. Although the elders largely accepted the missionaries and some of them adopted Fr Moreau's new method of ploughing with oxen, few of them desired baptism.

One might argue with Horton that, since the older generation's lives centred on traditional occupations, the greater part of their religious lives would focus on the lesser spirits. This may have been the case. Nonetheless, even these elders

who clearly had close contact with the macrocosmic sectors of the economy seemed slow to convert to Catholicism as distinct from Seventh Day Adventism. Chief Monze, for instance, probably the most 'modern' local person, had contact with Europeans for many years.

Chief Monze remained a close friend of Fr Moreau all through his life but made no attempt to receive baptism, much to the dismay of Moreau and the other missionaries. Similarly, the local headman, Ufwenuka, received baptism only at the point of death. One might contend that since these examples are taken from the ruling group they may have been concerned to preserve their position within traditional society and would thus have had a vested interest in preserving the integrity of the microcosm. Undoubtedly this argument has some validity if Monze's office is taken to be micro – rather than macrocosmic. However, even the progressive older people who had no direct links with positions of political power in the community or who would appear to have had little interest in preserving the status quo in itself rarely converted. The mother of Kachesa, widely acknowledged as the most progressive Chikuni farmer, seems to typify the attitude of the old to conversion:

Some years ago, a good old woman, the mother and grandmother of many of our Christians, who was baptized in danger of death from sickness, did not die; on the contrary, she made a perfect recovery; but to get her to church was more than the priest could do. She remained quite friendly, was proud of the fact that all her children were good Christians, but, as she put it, these new things, doubtless very beautiful in themselves, were not for an old woman like her. [ZMR, 1920: 233]

While, as we have suggested already, there seems to have been a movement away from the microcosmic cosmology, there is, however, little evidence to indicate, in the case of the chiefs, that they were involved in the cult of the supreme being or that the cult of such a being was well integrated into the total system, with its prayers and festivals. What appears to have been the situation at Chikuni is that, as the progressive older generation came to perceive the advantages of schooling for their children, they recommended it and its trappings (i.e. baptism) to them. For their own part, since they were beyond taking advantage of schooling, they felt that neither schooling nor Catholicism was for them. Such reluctance to be baptised on the part of the old folk hardly appears surprising. They had good reason to remain as they were, unless they were convinced of the value

of becoming a convert. Since conversion offered them no material advantage, the question remains: did the Catholic message have an intrinsic appeal because of its superior explanatory power? Conversion meant a radical change of life entailing a transfer of allegiance from a traditional system of tribal codes, rights and obligations to those of Catholicism. Such a change of life hardly appeared attractive to people in a society where most remained illiterate and consequently where oral consciousness emphasised community over the individual. As one of the early Jesuits at the mission reflected, 'We find these Batonga docile and well-disposed but weak and afraid of doing differently from the community'.

In such a context, individuals who decided to break with tradition needed strong assurance that they would not suffer personal tragedy by becoming victims of witchcraft. Even though the new religion sometimes promised increased spiritual power to its members, it did not provide any guarantee of immunity from intimidation. The conversion process of this period entailed few, if any, traces of syncretism or cultural adaptation of the Catholic message to local beliefs and practices or to the religious needs of a changing microcosm. Moreau and his associates tolerated belief in ancestor worship and the practice of bridewealth, lobola, but there is no indication that the missionaries explored the potential of traditional symbols and rituals to express the Catholic message, or, as Strayer (1976: 4) put it, that they tried to make religious contact in anything approaching African categories of thought. On the other hand, the missionaries demanded strict adherence to the practice of monogamy and even when polygyny formed part of the traditional social fabric they condemned it. Catholics who married second wives were expelled from the mission. There was a similar unambiguous condemnation of such things as purification of widows. Such missionary demands might have been accepted among the Tonga, where the pragmatic view of religion was emphasised, if, in times of trouble, the Catholic belief system proved more efficacious than traditional approaches. While the people's confidence in the efficacy of traditional rituals and practices may have begun to wane, especially at times of widespread famine, they had proved effective in the past. As far as the rituals and practices of Catholicism were concerned, there had been no long-term experience of their ability to assist in time of need. In more immediate terms, they proved no more efficacious than the traditional ones. After the 1916 drought and subsequent famine we read in the Jesuit journal:

The unprecedented drought this year is particularly unfortunate in

this country because it coincides with the death of Monze, who was looked upon by our Batonga as endowed with supernatural power to obtain rain for them; and it happens that at his death there was a vacancy that lasted all throughout what should have been the rainy season. A drowning man will catch a straw, and small wonder if some of our Christians, seeing their crops perishing and famine staring them in the face, went to visit the grave of Monze with a lingering thought that there might still be something in this old superstition. [ZMR, 1916: 363]

The older generation's reluctance to be converted thus makes good sense in that conversion entailed a radical and even dangerous change of lifestyle, while the superior religious power of Catholicism seemed at best questionable and for them there were few material advantages.

Message or Social Mobility: Youth

The religious message of the Chikuni missionaries appealed to the younger generation and their acceptance of it received approval from their elders most probably, as we have already indicated, because of the practical uses of the school. As far as the older generation was concerned, the school and its advantages were largely beyond them: so too was the message of the missionaries. Many of the beliefs and practices connected with conversion appeared alien. However, even for the younger generation who formally accepted the Catholic message through baptism the missionaries and their message embodied ambivalence, sometimes approaching paradox. The Chikuni missionaries themselves presented their students with the hope and promise of a more prosperous way of life, but they did not identify with the materialism of that modern movement which provided the economic and political underpinnings of such prosperity. From his first days at Chikuni, Moreau himself ensured that the mission would contribute to the material betterment of the Tonga. On a number of occasions, when Moreau's associates accused him of investing too much time in farming, he invariably replied, to be a farmer or rather to do farming is not necessarily opposed to missionary work. Moreau introduced the Tonga to the ox-plough with the hope that they would 'become a large class of intelligent, prosperous and contented peasants who own the soil they till' (Proceedings, 1927: 139).

Moreau's ideal appealed to some ambitious locals who later became prosperous peasants. Others, however, wanted to go further and become

proletarians by moving away from the land to better wage employment in the towns. Many of them experienced Moreau's reluctance to teach them English as frustrating. From Moreau's perspective, however, competence in English would lead them to industrial centres where they would swiftly be detribalised, something which he strongly resisted. While Moreau wished the Tonga to avail themselves of the material benefits that the emergence of colonial capitalism brought by becoming prosperous peasants, he did not wish them to be more fully integrated into that system by seeking employment in the industrial sectors of the economy. Moreau seemed to envisage himself as bringing a higher view and way of life to the Tonga yet, as Beidelman puts it, 'a life free of the materialism of modern industrial society'. In this respect Moreau represents the ambivalent position of the missionary who was separated both from the local people and from the settler community. He attempted to identify closely with the Tonga, but distance remained: he was European. He ate strange food, wore special clothes and shoes, and lived apart, where he had a chapel, school, dispensary and a regular supply of water, offering quite a contrast with the immediate surroundings. As a Frenchman of peasant stock in British territory Moreau was self-conscious not only about his identity but also about his ability to speak English. Moreau respected those British with whom he came into contact, the Sisters of Notre Dame, who formed part of the mission, government officials, and inspectors from the Native Education Department. Nonetheless he maintained a distance from government. On at least two occasions he declined British honours, including the offer of an MBE. Moreau's relationship with the British South Africa Company's administration was no less aloof. Often, as he became aware of the hardships that the local people endured because of the imposition of taxes in 1904, he openly criticised the administration, pleaded on behalf of the people and, on occasion, paid their tax for them. He appears to have had little desire to be identified with the official government of Northern Rhodesia. At the same time he befriended local chiefs and headmen. During Moreau's years the Chikuni Mission created an identity quite distinct from that of the colonial administrators. The local Tonga clearly distinguished between a colonial administrator and a missionary. The Chikuni Mission itself, largely the creation of Moreau, embodied similar ambivalence in that it formed part of an enclave separate from the surrounding area. It had European-style housing which included cement floors, brick walls and glass in the windows. Moreover, it had European standards of hygiene.

Nevertheless, the mission survived on a meagre income. By African standards the mission's lifestyle differed significantly from theirs. To them, European-type housing prompted amazement and emulation. As was the case with Moreau, the other Jesuits on the mission ate strange food, dressed differently, and lived apart. Through the mission some Tonga had become familiar with the ox-plough, and many, for the first time, saw a bicycle, a motorcycle and a car. From a Tonga viewpoint the missionaries were Europeans who had much more than they had, but they were by no means rich. 'They had better homes, better clothes, even a car and a motor bicycle, but they were not rich like other Europeans' (Mungwa, 1983).

To some Tonga, the Chikuni missionaries seemed frugal, if not poor, when compared to other Europeans. As Jesuits, men with vows of poverty, they professed a radical sense of indifference, that is, a desire to use creatures only for God's glory and not for personal comfort or enhancement. Possibly, such Jesuit indifference and frugality were interpreted at times as seedy and niggardly when seen against the lifestyle of other Europeans. Furthermore, the life of Jesuit celibacy was at odds with such Tonga values as polygyny and multitudinous offspring. It offered no clearly identifiable model for the formation of Catholic families. Undoubtedly, for some Tonga, the Chikuni Jesuits were 'failed Europeans' (Beidelman, 1982: 68). Thus, even to the school-people who spent much time in close contact with the missionaries, often on the mission, much of the ambiguity surrounding the missionaries' life and message remained. The Chikuni Mission's religious message appeared ambivalent on the question of the acquisition of material wealth and social mobility. The message demanded much that did not harmonise with traditional practices and values. Despite the mission's ambiguous message, it offered youth the prospect of upward mobility. If the Chikuni missionaries had adopted a more clearly materialistic approach without the attendant ambiguities of the religious message, would they have attracted many more adherents? Almost definitely they would. However, in the long term would such a procedure not have undermined rather than enhanced the growth of their church? In any event, although the Jesuits at Chikuni utilised the school as a means of attracting potential converts, they chose to present their converts with the paradoxical message which at this point appears to have had little intrinsic appeal. In presenting such a message the missionaries were aware that it meant a slow, up-hill qualitative expansion of their church. Probably, for many Tonga youth, the qualitative dimension of conversion was secondary to the prospect of material success and secular power associated with life in the towns. Chikuni's schooling increased one's chances of white-collar employment.

Conversion and Schooling

Between 1905 and 1939 the Catholic Church in Tongaland grew from a nucleus of two Jesuits and four native Catholics to a baptised population of about 6,880. During this period converts came primarily from the schools. The degree to which people were converted to Catholicism is difficult to estimate. From what we have implied about the motivation of the early converts, conversion ranged from nominal adherence because of the prospect of material rewards to some depth of commitment. Beyond doubt, some of the earliest converts were superficial.

Nominal adherence notwithstanding, by the early 1940s Chikuni had some loyal and devoted Catholics. Given restrictions on personnel and finance, the missionaries' success was impressive. By 1940 there was an overflow attendance at Sunday Mass at the main mission. By that year, too, the mission had registered 1,500 marriages. Besides statistics on baptisms, marriages and Sunday Mass attendance, which constituted the key criteria by which the efficacy of the Zambezi Mission had always been judged, other criteria included fidelity to monogamy, refusal to practise widow inheritance, renunciation of witchcraft and masabe spirit possession (ZMR, 1911: 296-7). For these latter criteria no accurate statistics exist even though one is led to conclude from the reflections of the missionaries that they considered the mission had been successful. Instances of backsliding, especially in the area of monogamy, prompted the missionaries to speak of 'success' with caution. In typically Catholic fashion of the time, the Jesuits viewed qualitative conversion as a long-term process that could not be judged on purely quantitative terms. To give a veneer of Christianity was considered to be easy, but one should only look for real results after years of patience in the face of apparent failure. Eventually, however, it was believed that seeming failure would be crowned with success, especially through the self-sacrifice of the missionaries:

In truth, many chapters might be written about the difficulties which beset the path of those who first tried to Christianize the natives ... If we turn to the history of the church in other lands, we know how, over and over again, many years passed before the preaching and labours of missionaries were crowned with anything like success. [ZMR, 1907: 244]

Ultimately, for the Jesuits, success in the work of conversion was God's doing, and the human contribution needed to be regarded with caution:

Many an edifying story, also, might be told to show that when once the natives they have knowingly and seriously made up their minds to live

and die as Christians, are capable of making generous sacrifices . . . but I am reluctant to publish these facts lest some might easily imagine that we praise that native whilst all the time it is the effect of God's grace, which even in such hard-hearted and low-born men knows how to triumph over an utterly corrupt nature. One often hears it said that it is lost time and labour to try to convert these natives. This might be true, if we had no signs showing that God Himself now wills their conversion and that actually he does give them the grace. [ZMR, 1898: 58]

Thus, while the schools undoubtedly gave the Church new members, many such converts were 'school converts', people who had become part of the mission not for reasons of the superior explanatory power of the religious message but because of the mission's ability to launch them into modern sectors of the economy. Though the missionaries had few illusions about the quality of faith of many such converts, they believed that in time God would effect more authentic conversions through their faltering efforts.

Conclusion

The argument of this article demonstrates that the primary motivation of African conversions at Chikuni centred on the benefits of modernisation which the mission offered. When local Tonga perceived that wage employment was closely linked with schooling they came to Chikuni to learn the white people's wisdom. Before that, Chikuni schools had poor attendance. From the missionaries' perspective, school provided the key means of gaining converts. It did this partly by creating an atmosphere where baptism was chosen almost automatically. The emergence of colonial capitalism with its need for wage labour thus facilitated the missionaries' task of conversion. A major compatibility existed between the Church and the State in that the mission's schooling prepared many Tonga for careers and for capitalist relations of production. Total commitment to capitalist values was, however, at odds with the missionaries' religious message even if the overall result was a relationship of symbolic ambivalence rather than of confrontation on the part of the mission. Since we have argued that many Tonga and other Zambians who went through Chikuni schooling became Catholic largely because of the material incentives which the mission offered, we might ask, to what were they converted? Were they converted to the precise ideals advocated by the missionaries or did they assign their own meaning to the new message? A precise answer is difficult to propose. Nevertheless, from our

discussion, it seems probable that many converts were syncretists, holding old and new faiths in synthesis and acting from both, in different situations, without much sense of inconsistency. It is also likely that converts espoused the paradoxical ideals of Chikuni Catholicism and those of colonial capitalism without much sense of their deeper incompatibility. By 1940, it seems, Chikuni had converts who embodied much of the mission's ideology even to the point of assuming ambivalent attitudes towards material progress. Although I have argued for the preponderance of social-structural incentives for conversion, I do not wish to imply that the intrinsic beauty and truth of the religious message was totally inoperative in the Chikuni conversion process. It simply was not the primary motivation.

This article confirms, though modifies, Horton's thesis in that while developments within the traditional cosmology seemed to enhance the movement towards a more 'universalist' belief system and practice, this study argues that socio-cultural factors predominated over traditional cosmology as the main reason for conversion. In conclusion, it needs to be emphasised that conversion to the paradoxical message of the Chikuni Jesuits entailed much complexity and further analysis of it would profit from a theory of symbols along the lines proposed by Van Binsbergen (1981: 69). Like the members of the Zambezi Mission, the Chikuni Jesuits were conscious of the ambiguity of their message and consequently considered that it would take their converts many years, even generations, to assimilate the new, often unabashedly foreign, values which many of them acquired in Catholic schools.

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Archival

ZMR - Zambezi Mission Record . This journal is available at Jesuit Archives in London, Lusaka and Harare.

NAZ - National Archives of Zambia in Lusaka.

JAL - Jesuit Archives, Lusaka.

JAH - Jesuit Archives, Harare.

CATHOLIC CONVERSION AND SCHOOL IN AFRICA TODAY

By Brendan P. Carmody

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, African conversions to Catholicism have increased significantly. In 1900, the continent had approximately 1.9 million Catholics or 1.8 per cent of the total 107 million of the continent's estimated population. Today, it is reckoned that 15 per cent of the 850 million people are Catholic, and this continues to grow.¹

Various reasons have been provided for such high levels of conversion. Some contend that the new Christians are standing, as it were, between the shipwreck of the old order and the tarnished fruits of self-rule of the new.² More theoretically, Robin Horton speaks of the emergence of a new cosmology emanating from, but not necessarily determined by, capitalism.³ For him, in traditional African society, much of the explanatory power of religion centered on lesser spirits—the microcosm (ancestors, spirits of the wild, etc.). More formidable spirits were proper to the large organizational complexes including states, trade-networks, and towns—the macrocosm. A two-tiered arrangement thus emerged where the daily life of individuals was largely contained within the microcosm, which lesser spirits administered and where the notion of the supreme being tended to be vague and poorly developed. Through increased trade and contact with the outside world, spirits of the macrocosm gradually took the place of the lesser spirits. Insofar as people became more involved with the world beyond the village, they evolved a code for governance of the wider circle. As the supreme being transcended the boundaries of the microcosm, he/she was seen to underpin a more universalist moral code. When a group reached this stage in cosmological thinking, it would be likely that its members would convert to a universalist religion such as Christianity or Islam if such were feasible.

Horton's theory did not address the various meanings of conversion nor determine the degree of religious change in question. By way of response, Humphrey Fisher spoke of conversion as a three-stage process: quarantine, mixing, and reform.⁴ Quarantine referred to the period when missionaries arrived and before they made any conversions. Mixing represented the time when the convert was in two separate worlds—the traditional and the new—resembling Nock's adhesion. Reform referred to the stage when a purified version of the new religion usually linked to the acquisition of literacy and, perhaps, Islamic jihads

existed. At the quarantine and mixing stages of early Catholicism in Africa, there was generally little attempt by missionaries to enter into dialogue with the traditional worldview.⁵ Converts did not, however, necessarily adopt what the missionaries presented nor did the conversion to the new religion always entail a decisive switch of allegiance. Much conversion resembled “adhesion” as distinct from “deliberate turning,”⁶ when converts were like potted plants struggling in foreign soil. If the new religion matched the old cosmology so poorly, it might be asked: Why did people convert? Did Catholic conversion occur because of its superior explanatory power as Horton proposed?

Preliminary Clarifications

In this article, it will be argued that school, as an agent of modernity, assumed a major role in the Catholic conversion of Africa. Modernity will be taken to mean progressive integration into a capitalist mode of production entailing wage employment and personal independence from tradition.⁸ In its encounter with modernity, it will be argued that the school (formal settings ranging from a few pupils to large-scale universities), however, came increasingly under state control with the result that conversion became progressively marginalized.

When speaking of conversion, we have noted the perspectives of sociologists Horton and Fisher, indicating a shift from traditional religion to Catholicism with varying degrees of assimilation. Until the Catholic Church’s major council, Vatican II in 1962, it will be seen to have entailed a pattern of adhesion in Africa, as described by Fisher. For the purpose of analysis, this discussion will employ the concept as defined by the philosopher-theologian Bernard Lonergan, for whom it entails a profound change of horizon leading to personal responsibility not only in religious matters but also morally and intellectually.⁹

Because of modernization, Catholic institutions throughout Africa today are faced with the challenge of making Catholic conversion both more pivotal to their mission and more responsive to the ecumenical, personal, and social concerns of the continent’s graduates. By taking this view, it is hoped that Catholic educators in Africa will better appreciate the historical dynamic that underlines the current educational reality and are thus able to evaluate their endeavors more effectively.

This article emerges from, and is framed by, the author’s twenty-five years of experience as a teacher and chaplain in Catholic educational institutions at various levels in Zambia, during which time he conducted research on a variety

of topics included here. Although Zambia provides the primal lens for the study, it is also informed by perspectives from other parts of the African continent both through the literature on the subject as well by means of Internet contact.¹⁰

Conversion and School: A Holistic View

In the late nineteenth century, Catholic missionaries to Africa gradually realized the school's potential for converts and thus built schools as a new mode of evangelizing.¹¹ Protestant missionaries in Africa had done this earlier because they perceived a need for basic literacy. If one were to become a convert, one needed to be able to read the Bible. From this perspective, the school also featured in economic development for people such as David Livingstone who placed commerce or economic development before Christianity and setting up churches.¹²

Concerns with reading the Bible or with large-scale economic development did not feature greatly for early Catholic missionaries in Africa. As a result, they did not emphasize schooling.¹³ When, however, they noted that they were losing ground to the Protestants, they chose to make the school a key instrument of conversion. Initially, however, there was little desire for school among the local population. Rather, it assumed some magnetism when it was perceived to be a means of entry to the white person's world. It often enabled them to join the labour force which, in part at least, fuelled the desire for European commodities. They could also now pay the colonial governments' imposed tax.¹⁴

The school came, in part, to be seen as the "surest means" of advancement after the visitation of the papal representative, Msgr. Authur Hinsley, to Africa in 1928.¹⁵ Consequently, during the colonial period, there was a rapid growth in the primary and secondary education offered under church jurisdiction. In addition to expanded economic opportunities, such church-sponsored education also gave the younger generations certain intangibles: a personal experience of Christian community life and Christian culture. Because so many were boarding schools, these institutions enabled the younger generation to adopt a new worldview.¹⁶

In British territories, missionary education generally became part of the grants-in-aid system whereby the government gave substantial grants if the schools improved their standards of teaching.¹⁷ At this time, the Catholic school was holistic, which meant that admissions were controlled to safeguard its religious character and identity.¹⁸ As elsewhere, the schools were for Catholics

and prospective converts to Catholicism. From this it might be inferred that such Catholic schools operated as “greedy institutions” in the sense of being all-absorbing with a hegemony determinative of conversion.¹⁹ Yet, as Lewis Rambo notes, even here responses to conversion advocacy entailed creativity.²⁰ We find for instance that, when struggling with missionary rules and regulations in a somewhat parallel situation, a child was counselled: “[S]uffer in silence, and when you finally leave school, choose to live by your own standards.”²¹ In a sense, modernity was not imposed; it was embraced although it hurt.²² Africans realized that mission schools dispensed new skills opening them to previously unimagined horizons.²³ Students and parents undoubtedly had agendas quite different from those of the missionaries, even African ownership of the school and conversion-generating culture was at best partial.²⁴ An association with schooling, however, helped the foreign missionary message gain an attraction that it otherwise lacked.²⁵

Through cooperation with the colonial enterprise in the provision of education, Catholic missionaries allied themselves with what they perceived to be a secularizing system.²⁶ Many of them regarded this with caution because they realized that, as Perry Glanzer notes in context of churches’ role in post-Communist education in Europe today, it opened them up to a loss of autonomy.²⁷ Thus, not only in South Africa with the introduction of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, but also throughout much of the continent, a movement toward secularization in the sense of state control was long under way. In any event, Africans continued to want the kind of school that best provided a gateway to modernity.²⁸

In this regard, conflict between Catholic authorities operating schools and their students occurred frequently if the schools were perceived to impede students’ social mobility.²⁹ Students complained if schools did not appear to be sufficiently academic and did not provide the tools needed to become more integrated into an industrializing society. For missionaries, such integration often entailed some reservation, as the relationship between sacred and secular was unclear.³⁰ Somewhat reluctantly, missionaries became part of a secularizing social system. At the same time, even in the education of future priests, the Catholic Church always insisted that there should be no question of a second-rate clergy. Student priests in Africa always had an education similar to their counterparts elsewhere. It was not an adapted or watered-down education.³¹ As

a result, by the time of national independence, the majority of African countries found themselves with secularized educational systems managed by religious groups who were ambivalent about what was emerging.¹²

Conversion and School: A Dualistic View

With the advent of national independence in various African countries by the late 1950s and early 1960s, a new order had emerged. From the perspective of national education, a modernization theory that entailed large-scale investment in human resources as an economic asset became paradigmatic.³³ Meanwhile, for the Catholic Church, the notion of the Catholic school underwent review after the Vatican Council (1962-65).

Earlier, the Catholic school, as we noted, was seen in holistic terms, underpinned by a theology of salvation, which declared that outside the church there is no salvation.³⁴ With Vatican II, major new emphases appeared. Conversion to Catholicism remained important, but it was presented in the context of the Church of Christ subsisting in but no longer coterminous with the Catholic Church. The institutions of Jews, Muslims, and those of other faiths were now seen to provide means of salvation.³⁵ Moreover, Vatican II stressed the need to create a more just and humane world order. Such developments had implications for how the Catholic school came to be perceived as an instrument of conversion. It nonetheless remained clear that the Catholic school was to have a key role in the church's mission.³⁶

Given the changed context, the Catholic school in Africa, as elsewhere, evolved into what James Arthur termed a dualistic model, whereby it became a single institution conducting two separate activities.³⁷ It emphasized both secular and religious aims, so that religious education, school assemblies, school liturgy, and religious events in general were viewed as having little, if any, connection with the teaching of science. Further, it did not assume that a majority of children were Catholic.³⁸

Such a situation emerged in many African settings largely because of national leaders' impetus to create nation states. Because ethnicity remained powerful, they had the difficult task of welding a variety of peoples into a unified group and the trans-ethnic and interdenominational school was seen to be central to this.³⁹ Modernization theory often seemed to be the one best way forward insofar as the contribution of science, mediated by technology, to national wealth and power

appeared assured. The need to educate for a scientifically literate community, which would at once produce and support professional classes of scientists and technologists, seemed obvious and urgent.⁴⁰ Thus, the school assumed a highly secular and nondenominational emphasis.

As dualistic models of the Catholic school emerged, the church's challenge became the need to preserve a satisfactory sense of Catholic identity and unity of purpose. This was perhaps not fundamentally different from elsewhere. It entailed a struggle with a creeping secularism or what Andrew Wright called "comprehensive liberalism", in which autonomy and individual freedom become foremost as communal ties tend to be shorn off leaving uprooted individuals.⁴¹ The school itself, therefore, contained the seeds of major contradiction. In feeding the demands of capitalism by promoting intellectual competence, it could undermine the value of community. Yet such ambivalently focused institutions responded to the strong impetus from African students, parents, teachers, and governments for "success" in a competitive market as best evidenced by an academic results hierarchy.⁴²

Conversion and School: A Pluralist View

The achievements of Catholic education at all levels in preparing people to assume high-level positions in the newly formed states in Africa were many and varied over the years prior to and after national independence. This included the education of many nationalist leaders who, like others, often lost contact with their grassroots and embraced totalitarian models of the state.⁴³ The challenge increasingly came to be not to create more authentic African Catholics in terms of a somewhat apolitical Africanizing of the liturgy, but to empower them to stand on their own feet in the search for a new and just political order.⁴⁴

As nation building progressed, the education systems tended to become even more domesticated.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, in the light of Vatican II, particularly after the ground breaking encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967)⁴⁶ which emphasized the need for sociopolitical reform, Catholic education emphasized the notion of faith that does justice. This posed a major challenge worldwide.⁴⁷ In Africa, it was coloured not only by an apartheid South Africa but also by the struggle of the newly independent states to craft and sustain national unity. Moreover, as Catholic schools became more pluralistic with large segments of both staff and students who were non-Catholic, a sense of identity and unity of purpose,

especially a concern for political rectitude, proved difficult.⁴⁸

In the late 1980s, the Catholic Church moved beyond its rather traditional apolitical stance towards explicit treatment of matters of justice, but it had to do so cautiously. Especially in Africa, it had to walk a thin line between supporting the status quo and, at the same time, striving to create social orders that were just.⁴⁹ Catholic educational settings, found themselves in a dilemma where parents and students expected a form of education and socialization that would result in much needed employment whereas the values of a Catholic education, if fully realized, could lead students to critically question the morality and justice of the prevailing socioeconomic arrangements.⁵⁰

With the so-called “second liberation” of Africa in the 1990s, the situation changed somewhat insofar as questioning the morality and justice of socioeconomic arrangements became more feasible.⁵¹ Despite this and an optimism about the future, Catholic educators in Africa could hardly forget their setting where in the recent past numerous coups and wars killed over one million people. The need to graduate men and women who would be not only intellectually competent but also educated to feel and act responsibly seemed pivotal. To achieve this, Catholic education needed to include a religious faith that was more than private and apolitical.⁵²

The Challenge for Catholic Education

Today, what Arthur described as dualistic and pluralistic models of Catholic institutions operate in many parts of Africa. In 2009, for instance, the church operated over twelve thousand infant schools, thirty-three thousand primary schools, almost ten thousand secondary schools, and about twenty universities. Many of the universities had emerged from what had previously been teacher education centers and now enrolled about seventy-six thousand students.⁵³

Despite ambivalence toward the long-time secularizing tendency they encountered, Catholic educational institutions continued to emphasize intellectual development, as measured by national criteria. In doing so, they gained much credibility.⁵⁴ Yet, they had to be watchful regarding issues of social justice.⁵⁵ Such wakeful concern continues:

With the Catholic schools targeting “excellence” for the betterment of their pupils who definitely stand out and shine at university, and, later in professional life, these quality institutions face a real challenge; namely,

*to have a positive effect on the education system of the country.*⁵⁶

The challenge remains not simply to proclaim a religious message that supports the status-quo but to ensure that the gospel message includes a larger perspective.⁵⁷

To include a justice dimension in Catholic education demands a shift of viewpoint. During the colonial era, as already indicated, Catholic institutions operated somewhat apolitically.⁵⁸ As newly independent nation states emerged, however, they operated alongside the backdrop of the Vatican's openness to modernity and its justice agenda. Although such new horizons of ecumenism and justice seemed right, practical application proved difficult. Among other reasons for this was a somewhat weakened unity of purpose juxtaposed to the fact that most of the institutions were now highly constrained by state-inspired curricula that focused almost exclusively on preparation for employment.⁵⁹

This emphasis on preparation for employment needs to be seen in the context of unstable job markets where certification and academic success became primal, particularly since variations in the opportunity structure led parents and children to perceive them to be the avenue to gaining employment.⁶⁰ Although the modernization paradigm has undergone significant adjustment in the light of dependency theory and later structural adjustment strategies, it remains the dominant trend in African education.⁶¹

In the United States and progressively in other areas of the world, the modernization paradigm proved to be reductive, frequently marginalizing religion and the human aspects of education. Even where religion was traditionally a part of the national educational system, it is now generally under review.⁶² In African settings, the value of having religion in the curriculum was not unquestioned.⁶³ Nonetheless, a religious dimension in education has been largely retained⁶⁴ even if, as elsewhere, its nature has been progressively influenced by the scientific outcomes-based criteria that guide other subjects. Religious education, for instance, has come to share the impersonal and abstract quality of a curriculum that leaves individuals uprooted in search of a larger personal framework.⁶⁵ It has become an examinable subject like any other with the result that religion has tended to be falsified.⁶⁶ Re-interpreting differences between religious denominations and faiths has come to be seen as secondary to their underlying unity and potential for social cohesion, thereby diminishing the role of doctrine and beliefs in religion and bracketing out the issue of truth in order to make religious education acceptable in curricula as an examination subject.⁶⁷

This raises the question of the relationship between knowledge and personal life and, as an extension of that, the relationship between Catholicism and other forms of religion and ideology. If the Catholic educational institution is to function in a religiously and culturally pluralistic setting, it needs to relate positively with different denominations, faiths, and ideologies.⁶⁸ At the same time, it needs to recognize that differences between Catholicism and other modes of religion and life remain real.

For Catholic education to achieve a satisfactory level of communication while preserving its integrity, it might be argued that a return to the holistic and dualistic model of school in the past would be appropriate. After all, historically, Catholic education aimed to be holistic and distinctive.⁶⁹ It was, moreover, enveloped by scholasticism and what the Catholic philosopher Bernard Lonergan described as classical culture, in which dialogue was one directional.⁷⁰ Western culture and way of life were then seen to be normative, and in its mission the Catholic Church did not view culture and religion empirically. As a student in an African secondary school in the 1950s put it: “[Y]ou know we prayed and sang at Mass, but we didn’t understand what it meant. We were like gramophones.”⁷¹ Catholic doctrine and way of life were indeed communicated but, as Frederick E. Crowe noted when speaking of traditional Catholic theology: “[I]t was all very logical. It proved everything. And it convinced nobody”.⁷² As reported from Zaire in the mid-1980s, in Catholic secondary schools religious instruction, generally speaking, consisted of weekly lessons given in French with images, symbols, and places that did not correspond to the creative imagination and feelings of Zairian pupils.⁷³ It was where the religious dimension tends to share what B. R. Taylor called an excarnation of reason,⁷⁴ stressing intellect without keeping in mind that affectivity and commitment are also roads to knowledge. Insofar as Catholic education promoted conversion in B. Lonergan’s sense of a profound change of horizon, it was almost exclusively cognitive.⁷⁵ It had little personal significance for the learner⁷⁶ Students in such settings, however, often received personal care even to the point of being given scholarships. Good students were, moreover, expected to master the learning they received often through highly disciplined and regulated programmes. They frequently did well in the examinations, which were the gateway to opportunity in a very restricted job market. This provided them with greater choice about how they could live. It freed them from the constraints of the village and its limited horizons. Did it,

however, prepare them to choose a way of life that would be in accord with what they truly wanted? It might be said that they received instrumental as opposed to constitutive freedom.⁷⁷ The holistic approach left distance between learning and life with significant consequences.⁷⁸

What we are focusing upon in Catholic education as it operated historically within the holistic and dualistic frameworks is illustrated by educator Paulo Freire. He spoke of two basic modes of educating, “banking” and “problem-posing,” in which banking entails an act of depositing, with students as depositories and the teacher as depositor.⁷⁹ The relationship between teacher and student embodies the character of an ideology of oppression. The humanism of the banking approach masks the effort to turn men and women into gramophones—the very negation of their ontological vocation to be fully human.⁸⁰

Traditional Catholic philosophy of education, though it aimed to be holistic, was weak at engaging the person existentially. What happened in school was often apolitical, abstract, and alien.⁸¹ It helped “a fortunate few” into a new worldview and way of life in which they saw themselves as privileged.⁸² Yet their education entailed a life in two worlds—that of their tradition and that of the new worldview. Even their Christian conversion included weak ownership of what was learned, as many of them became the pillars, secular and religious, of the new nation-states.

Education with such a pedagogic approach has been depicted graphically in fiction.⁸³ Although it provided high levels of intellectual development, it failed to address the person in his/her historicity. It neglected to truly meet the other.⁸⁴ Although the pedagogical relationship was thus blemished, it did not necessarily lack love or concern. Perhaps, as Joyce expressed it in another setting, the language of the educator was theirs and not that of those who were being educated.⁸⁵

To meet the person in his/her historicity, truly respecting his/her otherness, Catholic education is challenged to move beyond its usual curriculum, both acquired through cooperation with the secularizing state system and framed by a tradition in which Western culture was normative.⁸⁶ It needs more than impersonal and abstract learning that leaves individuals uprooted in search of a larger personal framework.⁸⁷ Otherwise, Catholic educational institutions will continue to struggle to explain how they have a distinctively Christian and Catholic identity and how this leads to the institution as distinctive rather than

one virtually indistinguishable from those under state control.⁸⁸

In moving beyond the secularist paradigm combined with streaks of classical culture, Catholic institutions are faced with the task of regaining their broader mission not in terms of the holistic or dualistic frameworks of the past, which, although distinctive, failed to reach the deep heart's core; instead, while taking care to remain rooted in their tradition, they need to more fully address those whom they are educating. The students' historicity as a starting point has to become more central as it embodies the kind of love that profoundly respects and educates the learner to freedom. In P. Freire's terms, we are speaking of a pedagogy that is dialogical and entails an "I-Thou" relationship in which the person is truly engaged.⁸⁹

Toward the Future

If Catholic education is to produce graduates who are both intellectually developed and responsible, it will mean not simply that its students are able to read a book, master the contents, and do well in examinations. It will presume that but will demand more. To truly own his/her learning, the student will need to be led to continually verify the learning in his/her experience and reflection.⁹⁰

Catholic education is faced with moving beyond learning as an abstract and reified exercise toward an inward journey in which the learner turns to him/herself as part of his/her sociocultural setting. It is where the individual is enabled to make "a fully conscious decision about his/her horizon, outlook, and worldview."⁹¹ This means not some notional adherence to a Catholic worldview as in the past but conversion in Lonergan's sense of a profound personal change of horizon, leading to personal responsibility in the different domains of life. For this to happen, basic literacy is needed, but it needs to be combined with a capacity to use that literacy in assuming personal responsibility. In Patrick Giddy's words:

*This means nothing more than in understanding the person we start from the individual's self-awareness, and point out that knowing what knowing is, is not like studying some distant planet of which we have no direct experience. Rather it is a matter of the fuller appropriation (through growing understanding) of a capacity we already have but do not exercise to its full extent.*⁹²

To promote this inner journey remains critical if Catholic education is to

acknowledge the learner in the depths of his/her everydayness.⁹³

To enable students not only to become intellectually competent but also to achieve the kind of personal integration that we note requires learning that is both informative and transformative.⁹⁴ It calls for an education geared towards empowering people to make decisions that are free not only in the sense of being liberated from the constraints of village life and its horizons as in the past, but also in being enabled to choose a way of life that each truly wants. Such education requires discipline, but it needs to guard against being overly protective, as has often characterized Catholic education as delivered in the holistic and dualistic settings of Africa's past.⁹⁵

As Freire emphasized, education needs to be historical if the transformative aspect of intellectual development is to be realized.⁹⁶ It should point toward the person's centre. Otherwise, it opens the way to leaving its graduates as organs of society, victims of injustice (including HIV/AIDS), notionally aware of their capacity to be instruments of justice but deeply in need of the wisdom. Such transformative education towards a responsible choice of worldview seems imperative in an Africa where over 300 million people live on less than a dollar a day, where huge numbers are without access to clean water and lack basic health care, and where numerous coups and wars have shattered people's lives.⁹⁷

Given such reality, it is surely not a time for "education from the neck up."⁹⁸ Rather, there is a need to promote the individual's capacity to negotiate self-fulfillment with conscience, such that freedom is not simply to do what one wants without concern for the other, because any conception of being true to oneself that staves off horizons of significance becomes distorted.⁹⁹ The individual needs to learn to assume a stance in which truth and justice prevail, in which "we" is not simply the plural of "I", or in which development does not lack care.¹⁰⁰ He/she needs to realize that as people who live together we cannot escape the thought that the terrible occurrences that we see around us are quintessentially our problems and our responsibility—whether or not they are anyone else's.¹⁰¹

Education for conversion faces a major challenge to promote people toward being religiously responsible, but, as an intrinsic part of this, it needs to include responsibility for a good of order that is not only efficient but also true.¹⁰² For Africa, the development of democracy, justice, and the common good remains a major objective when it is still all too easy to limit the concept of neighbour to one's own clan.¹⁰³

Conclusion

Conversion to Catholicism became closely linked to the provision of education in Africa early in the twentieth century. Until Vatican II and beyond, Catholic education operated under what Arthur described as a holistic model, in which the Catholic school was regarded as an agent of Catholic Church growth. After Vatican II, largely coinciding with the emergence of independent African states, the relationship became less linear, markedly changing so that non-Catholics, who form an ever increasing part of Catholic educational settings in Africa, can be genuinely included. In broadening its agenda, however, the Catholic institution, be it primary or secondary school, college, or university, faces the task of providing an education that, true to its roots, remains Catholic but is also catholic, open to the stranger in its mission to produce graduates who are professionally competent but also responsible intellectually, morally, and religiously.

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THE NATURE AND ROLE OF CHRISTIAN CONVERSION IN ZAMBIA¹

By Brendan Carmody

Abstract

This article presents a historical view of Christian conversion in Zambia over approximately a century. It engages with sociological theories of conversion to illuminate and deepen understanding of the historical unfolding of the Christian enterprise. It identifies elements of Christian conversion in order to determine whether conversion is preponderantly a product of tradition or of the Christian gospel. The nature of Zambian belief in Christ at various stages in the historical development is thus analysed. Among other things, the article demonstrates how Christian conversion remains a complex interchange between religion and culture and how Zambian perception of being a Christian includes a framework by which to better negotiate paths through ever increasing and perhaps engulfing modernity. Evidence indicates that Christian conversion emerges as a fundamental choice progressively superseding tradition and as a mode of sustaining local but changing identity in the face of globalization that remains highly alluring yet homogenizing.

Zambia currently has a population of over 10 million people, 70 per cent of whom are Christian.² The Christianization of the population has taken place since the 1880s, when the first Christian missionaries arrived,³ and since their arrival, the conversion of the local people to some form of Christianity has been an important aspect of Zambian life. In this article, I identify some of the dynamics of this phenomenon over approximately a century. In discussing conversion at different points, I use the Horton-Fisher discourse to determine whether conversion to Christianity in Zambia has been largely the reformulation of traditional religion or whether it is distinctively new.⁴ Among my basic assumptions in this discussion are that converts are normally key agents of their own conversion and that they are capable of intentional action, not simply driven by forces over which they do not have control.

Early Conversion to Christianity

It could be argued that by the time of the arrival of the first missionaries in

Zambia in the 1880s the local people had become involved in life beyond their village setting. By the early 1900s, many of those who lived in what today is Zambia had emigrated to the south in search of wage employment.⁵ As the British South Africa Company gained possession of the territory through the Lochner Concession in 1890, additional factors such as the construction of a railway link in the years between 1902 and 1906 exposed people to the larger world.⁶

In his discussion of conversion in the context of Africa, Robin Horton has provided a key paradigm.⁷ He noted that the qualities attributed to the supernatural entities in a religious system are analogous to the scope of the human world over which these entities hold sway. In African societies, traditionally, much of the explanatory power of religion centred on the lesser spirits (ancestors, spirits of the wild). More formidable spirits were proper to the larger organizational complexes, including states, trade networks and towns, the macrocosm. In typical African cosmology, a two-tiered arrangement emerged where the daily life of individuals was largely contained within the microcosm which the lesser spirits administered and where the notion of the supreme being tended to be vague and poorly developed. Through increased trade and contact with the outside world, spirits of the macrocosm tended to take the place of the lesser spirits, since, in Horton's view, African religion is primarily an instrument by which people interpret and explain the world.⁸ Thus, the balance of emphasis between the Supreme being and the lesser spirits was determined by the degree to which the community focused on microcosm or macrocosm. Among other things, where communities had become macrocosmic, this usually meant increased attention to the Supreme being.⁹ Although Horton argued that traditional societies were highly conservative, he did not mean that they were closed or less rational than those which were more developed.¹⁰ It has been further contended that traditional religion was both dynamic and multilayered with a history of contradiction, contestation, and innovation.¹¹

Whilst admitting a shift in religious cosmology because of increased interaction with the larger world, Horton argued that as people became more involved in the social life beyond the local community, they tended to evolve a moral code for governance of the wider circle. Since the supreme being transcended the boundaries of the microcosm, he was seen to underpin the universalist moral code.¹² As a group reached this point, they began to grope for a more elaborate definition of the supreme being and if a world religion happened to be present,

its ideas were likely to be selectively accepted.¹³ The world religions were thus seen by Horton as catalysts.

The social changes that had taken place in what today is Zambia in the later part of the nineteenth century would approximately fit Horton's position of readiness for adoption of various forms of Christianity. Among other things it seems clear that Zambian traditions had shifted towards focusing on a high God so that early Christian missionaries generally identified the traditional high God with the Christian God.¹⁴

Horton's theory of selective adaptation of the new message in accord with tradition supports Walls' hypothesis that African Christianity initially emerged as African religion developed and was shaped by African concerns and agenda.¹⁵ Thus, Africans responded to Christian preaching by providing a more central role to the God of their pre-Christian past even though before then there may not have been a cult of that God, as most of the religious activities were directed at the lesser spirits. In Horton's terms, what the potential converts accepted from the missionaries was largely determined by the structure of the 'basic cosmology'.¹⁶ Undoubtedly, the role of the high God in Zambia had been extended not only, in many instances, because of the forces of modernity but also with the advent of Christianity. What remains difficult to determine is the degree to which the concept of high God today has developed from Christianity or is an extension of the traditional notion. Some scholars argue that it is the traditional idea of God that has persisted and this God is very much the God of the early chapters of the Old Testament.¹⁷

Christianity's Dialectical Development

Most Christian missionaries in Zambia, as elsewhere, focused, however, on the God of the New Testament where Christ was, doctrinally, central and where God as Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit was proclaimed. Perhaps, in this respect, Christian missionaries were more firmly insistent on the purity and orthodoxy of their message than Muslims, which may in part account for the rise of Christian independent religious movements, especially where issues of misfortune and illness were poorly acknowledged.¹⁸ The somewhat rigid approach of missionaries manifested in such things as their insistence on orthodoxy, insensitivity to local religions and cultures, highly restricted dialogue between advocate and recipients, and large-scale hegemony in the schools, would suggest that local conversions

included minimal assimilation. People often stood with one foot on either side of the fence without moving to conversion as a deliberate turning from an earlier form of religion.¹⁹ Nonetheless, local people were pressured to adopt highly alien Christian concepts such as those linked to life beyond the grave, Christ a God-man, Biblical emphasis on monogamy and the equality of all before God. This on occasion may have led to the formation of some breakaway movements, though the majority of converts remained within the mission churches.²⁰

As most people who became Christians in a particular Zambian church remained, the specific content of their conversion is difficult to discern. Despite missionary insistence on orthodoxy, the conversion process entailed selection, adaptation, and various degrees of assimilation on the part of the recipients. We may thus ask: to what were these early Christians converted? Did conversion always mean a radical break with one's past?²¹ Although Fisher does not directly address the issue as to why people converted, his paradigm for understanding conversion may prove helpful.²² He spoke of conversion in terms of three stages: quarantine, mixing, and reform.²³ Few if any conversions occurred in the quarantine stage, though it prepared the ground for conversion.²⁴ Thus, for him, most early conversions were likely to be in the mixing stage where, for some time, the old and the new would rest side by side. A person could thus be in church in the morning and witch finding in the afternoon without much sense of inconsistency. This may have been somewhat of a carryover from a traditional attitude of religious pragmatism.²⁵ Indeed, local people may have been quite unaware of difficulties with the survival of the old, but they may also have been afraid to talk about them to their religious leaders who might rebuke their superstitions.²⁶ At the same time, Fisher argued that many Christian groups emphasized orthodoxy so much that the mixing stage was to some degree omitted.²⁷ As the primary concern of the missionaries was religious instruction which did not include traditional religion as a prelude to baptism, there was little encouragement to engage in dialogue.²⁸ As Hinfelaar noted:

The meeting of the Zambian peoples with the Catholic missionaries was not without certain negative aspects. Apart from the writings of Fr. Molinier, there was hardly any dialogue with the tenets of African traditional religion and culture. Most of its beliefs were condemned as being pagan, and the missionaries demanded a complete break with the past. The missionaries seemed to have little knowledge of the people they

*met. They tended to regard the minds of their new recruits as a tabula rasa as an unwritten slate on which the first outlines of Christian civilization had to be drawn.*²⁹

The missionaries' concern with orthodox doctrine was certainly strong and was often translated into strict and sometimes long training before baptism.³⁰ Nevertheless, the rate at which baptisms were administered as well as the seriousness of the preparation for admission varied not only between Protestants and Catholics but within organizations of the same denominations as well as with personalities within these.³¹ Whatever else, it did not necessarily mean that the converts adopted what missionaries considered to be the true doctrine for undoubtedly early converts understood new religious ideas from the Bible and elsewhere in indigenous terms.³² This is well exemplified for instance in what took place at Chikuni mission in 1949 when the mission's founder, Fr. Moreau, died:

*...he was given a splendid traditional funeral with drumming, dancing and feasting, It was a great honour, but the Irish missionaries who had taken over Chikuni were deeply horrified at such 'pagan' rituals and a ceremony of repatriation was held with sermons to condemn what had taken place.*³³

Such an event would concur with Horton's thesis that religious beliefs and practices would be selected in line with the 'basic cosmology'.³⁴ In this respect, for Fisher, adoption of the new religion did not always lead to making a decisive switch of allegiance. People stood with one foot on either side of the fence. In Nock's terms this was called adhesion which is contrasted with conversion, the 'deliberate turning from indifference or from some earlier form of piety to another, a turning that implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, and that the old is wrong and the new is right'.³⁵ Selection presents no major problem to Fisher for he sees it as a natural process. Rather, for him, the basis on which the selection was made is the issue. Was it principally inspired by the Christian message or by the traditional cosmology?³⁶

Whatever mixing of old and new occurred, it resulted in a setting where missionary teaching was almost universally expressed in western thought patterns, liturgy was not much adapted to the local circumstances, churches were adorned by European forms of art, and hymns were largely a mixture of melodies picked from missionary backgrounds. Moreover, many Christian missionaries rushed

straight and somewhat arrogantly into the provision of social services, especially health care and schooling, almost from the beginning.³⁷ The outcome meant that there could be much catechizing without sufficient prior understanding of the local mentality and culture, with the inevitable effect that the new message either did not penetrate deeply or became seriously twisted. In saying this, however, it needs to be noted that, while Christian missionaries often invested insufficient energy into studying the mindset and setting of the local population, they played a central role in the preservation of traditional culture, language and literature through, among other things, their work at translation of the message into local idioms as well as the nature of the relationship between missionary and local that such a process would entail.³⁸ However, movement beyond this to what Rambo calls assimilation remained piecemeal.³⁹ Yet, Sanneh firmly rejects the proposition that the Christianity that locals adopted was essentially European religion.⁴⁰ If it was not European religion, then was it indigenous or syncretistic Christianity to use Tippet's term? It remains difficult to say for it usually entailed mixing which does not admit of such unambiguous alternatives.

School in the Conversion Process

At this early period of Christian missions in Zambia it is probably true that becoming a Christian provided a permit for schooling and a mode of upward mobility rather than a way of faith and life.⁴¹ Clearly, as many scholars note, motivation for conversion was many sided.⁴² What makes any voluntary conversion process possible is a complex confluence of the 'right' potential convert coming into contact, under proper circumstances at the proper time, with the 'right' advocate and religious option.⁴³ Desire for schooling came to be perceived in many instances to be the 'right' opening for many youths becoming involved with a Christian community. Yet, as is well known, in many instances, local people initially had to be enticed to go to school, which was frequently a difficult and frustrating task for missionaries.⁴⁴ At the beginning, there was no overwhelming desire for schooling. Eventually, however, this changed, probably as the perception of the opportunity structure shifted or as the school came to be perceived as a gateway for access to European technical power. Perhaps adoption of Christianity might then be seen more as meeting needs, both for self-esteem or even identity, and establishing relationships in a new social network, rather than as the result of the need for a conceptual system.⁴⁵

When more children came to the schools, the number of 'school converts' - as they came to be called - increased. Because of the large-scale control and autonomy which the various missionary bodies then had over their schools, the freedom of choice of both staff and students was greatly limited. At one Catholic school in 1926, for instance, a rule read thus:

*All boys must get up half an hour before community Mass. All boys must understand that though there is no obligation to hear Mass daily, not to do so when Mass is said so near and when one has no reason to abstain from it is a great want of understanding or a great neglect which is not without fault. Therefore boys who absent themselves from Mass without sufficient reason will be liable to punishment.*⁴⁶

While this may be a somewhat extreme case, it provides some sense of the hegemony that often pervaded mission boarding school life. The hidden curriculum of the daily round with its cultural and symbolic capital could prove to be very directive.⁴⁷ Such institutions fostered the kind of conformity which we read about in *Blade among the Boys* where a child was counselled to 'suffer in silence, and when you finally leave school, choose to live by your own standards'.⁴⁸ Many of the school converts in their half choice, as Hastings put it, were thus likely to be somewhat ambivalent about their Christianity as they often accepted it without the possibility of major questioning particularly at the public level.⁴⁹ There was thus the high likelihood that their version of the Christian message was poorly assimilated.⁵⁰ This may seem somewhat paradoxical since schools and the literacy they delivered would have been expected to promote some degree of critical, analytical, even revolutionary, thought.⁵¹ Yet, for whatever reason, critical expression remained limited as did the articulation of political views. There was a tendency even for those who were educated to accept without major protest.⁵² The degree of assent depended somewhat on the denominations involved. Protestant groups for instance would have placed heavy emphasis on reading and personal interpretation of the Bible while Catholics were more likely to stress catechism and obedience to Church directives.⁵³ Regardless of the emphasis, however, it would seem that the growth of literacy in somewhat restricted church settings appears to have favoured the acceptance of Christianity over traditional religion.⁵⁴

Despite some growth in the rate of literacy, on the whole, during much of the colonial era in Zambia, we are dealing with conversion as a mode of adhesion,

where, as earlier noted, Fisher in general speaks of the mixing stage in both Islam and Christianity and notes how converts may not strictly follow what they had been taught and hypothesizes that the mixing stage was sometimes omitted by groups of Christians. In this way, converts moved abruptly from the quarantine to the reform stage. Rather they followed somewhat blindly what they had been given. As one author put it, 'People believed without proof. They did not examine to find out how true the new religion was compared with traditional religion'.⁵⁵

To distinguish clearly between what people professed and what they in fact believed could thus be difficult. So, for instance, it is not surprising to find that while Christ was accepted as Son of God in a general way, as it was central to the missionaries' message, it is far from obvious that Christ was quite so central in the faith life of the people. Christ was not even at the core of the Christian sect which youths, inspired by Bible teachings, formed in the 1960s.⁵⁶ Is this to say that the Christianity of many Zambians at this time provided little real alternative to traditional religion? Did Christian conversion bring nothing new? If Christianity did not bring anything new, we may be inclined to conclude that people mainly became Christian not because of some superior explanatory power of the new religion but because of the perceived material benefits which such a step would bring.⁵⁷ Among other things, as we noted, it gave them access to school and opened the door to modernity. As Berman put it, 'Africans realized that mission schools functioned as dispensers of new skills which opened up previously unimagined horizons and possibilities'.⁵⁸

In discussing conversion that took place in various Zambian churches and groups, whether through the agency of schools or not, its relationship to perceived material benefits and the growth of modernity needs discussion.

Conversion and the Social Order

Van Binsbergen has noted that there is need to attend to the structural change operative in the conversion process.⁵⁹ He, among others, argues that option for the new religion may not be satisfactorily explained simply in terms of individual choice.⁶⁰ Becoming a Christian seemed also to mean becoming part of an evolving and often rather secularized social order.⁶¹ In that way, as Kaplan expressed it, the new Christian identity was dually constructed emerging both through the ideas of individuals and the institutions and circumstances that constrained and routinized the world in which people acted, often outside their full awareness.⁶²

Nonetheless, as Van Binsbergen further noted, while there was large-scale correspondence between mainstream Christianity and the development of capitalism in Zambia, there were also contradictions in so far as twentieth century missionaries embodied shades of anticapitalism.⁶³ One could thus say that the religious change which was under way created not just new modes of thought but also new social structural arrangements which generally coincided with the changing social order.⁶⁴ It has been argued that this was needed for long-term commitment.

Even when belief and orthodoxy formed a large part of missionary approaches to conversion, most religious institutions had structures which augmented the conversion process emotionally and socially on a weekly, daily, perhaps hourly basis, through various rites and rituals both in school and out of school. In this way they attempted to build up a kind of community and identity based on faith rather than tradition.⁶⁵ Precisely at what point individuals crossed the dividing line (if they did) between adhesion and conversion proper, in Fisher's terms, is difficult to say.⁶⁶

In what may often have been a gradual transition from the old to the new, was there a major change? For Horton, it would appear that there was not, for he argued that it was the traditional cosmology that retained the pivotal and even determinative role in the subsequent religious development. As opposed to this, Fisher admitted continuity between the traditional way of thinking and what was received from the new religion, but stressed the newness of what had been received with its power to modify the traditional cosmology.⁶⁷ Among other things, Fisher argues against Horton in favour of what he sees as the new religion's *sui-generis* nature. For him, the new religion is seen to shape and not simply to be shaped by external factors whether these be traditional culture, even traditional religion, or not.⁶⁸ In a similar way, Gray, among others, both questioned the centrality of adopting belief in a high God in the conversion process and instead identified the introduction of radically new concepts.⁶⁹ He noted, for instance, that Christian perspectives on life after death were distinctively new:

*Suddenly the hereafter was no longer a faint reflection of this world, no longer was it primarily concerned with the community's survival, no longer would it slip imperceptibly into the forgotten past.*⁷⁰

Linked to the new outlook on life beyond the grave were also novel concepts of heaven and hell, even that of Satan.⁷¹ Furthermore, both Gray and

Fisher speak of the new idea of history as progress linked to a linear rather than a cyclical conception of time which Bible reading presented.⁷² It may also need to be acknowledged in discussing the new non-traditional aspects of the Christian message that new Christians manifested profound transformation in being prepared to make great sacrifices even if necessary of their own lives as happened elsewhere on the basis of the new religion.⁷³ Among other instances of such sacrifice would be what was sometimes involved in the acceptance of a vocation to the priestly or religious life within the Catholic community. As Isichei put it, 'Each religious vocation represented the most radical renunciation in cultures where children are cherished above everything'.⁷⁴

The demand to live monogamously and the struggle with which many tried to comply with it provides similar evidence of the price that people were willing to pay in order to be Christian.⁷⁵ A further aspect of the conversion experience during the colonial era was its predominantly personal and private nature. Former President Kaunda, when asked if he felt that the churches had been sufficiently supportive of the nationalist cause, emphasized that the churches should have been more involved.⁷⁶ As Hinfelaar put it, 'Most missionaries worked hard but had little interest in the changing political climate of Northern Rhodesia, and in general they were not inclined to train their lay leaders for any liberation from European tutelage'.⁷⁷

The relationship between religion and politics at this period seemed to have been somewhat ambivalent even if the Christian message had potential to challenge the structures of society while many nationalist leaders hailed from mission schools.⁷⁸ Missionaries varied greatly in their attitudes to self-rule. Hastings spoke of at least five voices ranging from people like J. H. Oldham of the liberal English speaking church to people like Alice Lenshina.⁷⁹ This large-scale division between Christianity and colonial politics formed part of the fabric of the colonial heritage which, to use Van Binsbergen's language, places Christian conversion and new style education largely within a correspondence rather than a dialectical relationship, with correspondence entailing compatibility whereas dialectic spelled various levels of contradiction.⁸⁰

In such a context, it would then make sense that the role and meaning of Christ should remain ambiguous in converts' lives. Colson, for instance, noted that in the early years of her research among the Tonga in the 1940s and 1950s she rarely heard people mention Christ.⁸¹ This does not necessarily mean that

adoption of the new religion meant that there was no change in people's religious lives. It is more likely to signify that what often predominated in the conversion dynamic was not adhesion or commitment to a new tightly argued belief system but to the development of new relationships of friendship and fellowship transforming identities or what Horton identified as the communion dimension.⁸²

Zambian conversion in the colonial era thus appears to have been heavily tradition based, even adhesion-like and private where literacy grew in a setting of missionary hegemony. Yet, vestiges of something distinctively new are also evident in the appearance of a faith based community, fidelity to which could be highly countercultural.

Christianity in the Post Independence Era

After Independence in 1964, the fostering of new community relationships between various ethnic groups in nation building became a key factor, as Zambia endeavoured to create a nation state.⁸³ It marked a decade of relative economic prosperity, while church-state relationships remained moderately harmonious as churches localized their leadership and perhaps wished to avoid possible accusations of lack of support during the colonial period.⁸⁴ This did not however preclude the state from greatly restricting church power especially in the areas of education and medicine. Much to the dismay of churches, it also included the introduction of the Termination of Pregnancy Act.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, while, in a sense, church leaders kept their heads down, their moral standing grew and churches became some of the few institutions that the common person could trust.⁸⁶

The adoption of a one-party state in 1972 caused little immediate alteration to church-state relationships. However, as one-party state rule became more dictatorial and as it spoke of scientific socialism, churches now with almost total local leadership became progressively more critical often barely avoiding direct confrontation with the government.⁸⁷ By 1990, the Catholic Church in particular openly criticized the ruling party, revealing a more clearly prophetic voice for religion in the country than ever before.⁸⁸ Thus, Churches came to be seen as agents of political change facilitating a change of government.⁸⁹ Within a short time after the change of government in 1991, the state President, Frederick Chiluba, himself a born-again Christian, declared Zambia a Christian nation indicating a close alliance with some religious groups.⁹⁰ During the Chiluba era of government (1991-2001) church-state relations continued to be positive, if

somewhat ambiguous and diverse after the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation.⁹¹

In this period of significant social change including further economic collapse and the increasing awareness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, many Zambians continued to become Christians.⁹² Many were by then being born into Christian families. The school system also contributed to rising numbers, but less significantly than earlier, because even the grant-aided schools had become much more state-directed, minimizing the impact of any specifically religious ethos.⁹³ Becoming Christian meant in many cases choosing to join mainline churches. This had always been an option but it now also included numerous predominantly North American sects which mushroomed especially after the election of Chiluba.⁹⁴

In all of this, one may ask: what was the nature of Christian conversion? Writers speak in terms of a double approach, namely, that of inculturation and praxis, where inculturation attempts to make faith in Christ more African while praxis focuses not only on the Africanization of faith but on transforming society in the light of faith.⁹⁵ Although the process of inculturation, in which both tradition and Christianity preserved their respective identities, may not have featured explicitly or strongly in the early Christianization of Zambia, since the 1960s it has become a major emphasis in most churches. As we have noted, Fisher conjectured that in many cases the mixing phase of conversion may have been omitted. Even traditional religion featured rarely, if at all or negatively, before the late 1960s in religious education programmes. Perhaps, in the early days, as Colson put it:

*Any child who was in school was ordered not to attend any community ritual involving the spirits working for the benefit of the community or any other offering to the ancestors ... this was very much frowned upon ... These were the days when missionaries controlled the schools.*⁹⁶

Inculturation as interpenetration of faith and culture thus seemed to feature thinly in the early conversion experience, but has assumed a new role in many church circles as nations became independent and as the population became more literate over the past three decades.⁹⁷ In this more recent context, one may wonder: who is Christ for Zambians? Putting the question in Horton's terms: is conversion motivated primarily by the fact that Christianity provides a better explanation of life or by concerns of upward mobility and belonging? Whatever

dominant motivation exists for conversion to Christianity among Zambians, the process is evidently multifaceted.⁹⁸ Moreover, it has probably shifted over time, though we find that those who call themselves Christians today do so mainly because they attest that being a Christian gives meaning to their lives. When in 2004, for instance, one hundred Zambians of various denominations, educational backgrounds and ages were asked why they were Christians, many claimed that it was because they experienced a need for salvation and healing, while the notions of Christ as Messiah and Saviour formed key concepts including, but not often making explicit, belief in the resurrection. Being a Christian is also seen to be important in so far as it provides a place to belong and inspires good behaviour. In this way, becoming a Christian may provide a sense of personal identity not necessarily either enhancing or threatening ethnic identity.⁹⁹

Whilst most Zambians view Jesus primarily as a human person, this does not exclude seeing him as Son of God. How he might be seen to be truly human yet divine continues to be a complex matter for them.¹⁰⁰ Today, perhaps more than in the past, there is greater emphasis on Jesus, within a context in which God is perceived as Trinity - Father, Son, and Spirit. Nonetheless, even today, it is questionable how far it would be true to say that Jesus is perceived to be God.¹⁰¹ In a random survey of 125 people conducted in 2005, 71 per cent responded positively to the question: is Jesus God? At the same time, evidence suggests that God the Father rather than Jesus retains a more central place especially in people's prayer life.¹⁰² Nevertheless, Walls notes that:

*The new religious systems of Africa are distinctively Christian in that they not only magnify the God component which has always been present in African religion but identify that component with the God of Israel and the Scriptures, and with the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This has led to another crucial development of the God component in African religion - the Christian impact has greatly intensified the sense of immediacy of the presence of God.*¹⁰³

How Jesus is perceived to be God remains unclear but it would seem that his divinity in itself does not entirely distance him from people's ability to see him as human. According to the survey already mentioned, he is seen to be a person who embodied much of what is good in people. Respondents identified his humility, compassion, and commitment to the poor. The fact that he suffered also has a strong appeal probably because many people experience much pain in

their everyday lives.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, for most Zambian Christians, that Jesus was a Jew matters little from the viewpoint of identifying with him in his humanity but is of greatest significance to them in so far as he was a historical as opposed to some kind of mythical figure.¹⁰⁵ They are also ready and able to see beyond his specific historical existence and to embrace his universal mission.¹⁰⁶

Various presentations of Jesus are inevitably found in a country that has many different churches and sects. For some, allegiance to a particular church and its doctrines is of paramount importance, but this is not so for many others.¹⁰⁷ People thus shift churches somewhat freely, often seeing faith in Christ as pivotal rather than the faith and doctrines presented by specific churches. As Colson notes: ‘... for many, to be Zambian means to be Christian but less certainly to be a member of some church’.¹⁰⁸ Reasons for moving from one religious group or institution to another usually include personal relationships, which may include encounter with a charismatic figure, marriage, shift of residential location, friendship ties, peer influence, form of worship, perceived better moral or social life of the new group, and not infrequently a more acceptable interpretation of the Bible.¹⁰⁹ In a survey of 406 students at the University of Zambia in 1999, 19 per cent considered that their church was the right one while 91 per cent of 780 university students surveyed in 2005 agreed that all Christian churches should unite. It is not entirely surprising then that movement in and out of churches while conforming to none is somewhat typical.¹¹⁰ One might conclude that, despite a history of some Christian church rivalry, Zambians’ Christian faith is pluralistic and tolerant. Among other things, this has facilitated much inter-church cooperation not only in promoting a common religious education programme for basic and high schools but also in challenging the government ideology of Scientific Socialism and in the subsequent promotion of justice.

Although Christ’s life and biblical teachings now feature prominently in most Zambian Christians’ religious lives, this does not mean that church-rooted ideals such as abstinence from sex out of marriage are frequently practised or that faith is the guiding motivating force of human behaviour.¹¹¹ If 15 per cent or more of the population is affected by HIV/AIDS, it is likely that most are Christian.¹¹² How to create a better correspondence between people’s religious beliefs and sexual behaviour remains a major challenge especially for religious organizations.¹¹³

Christian faith is however seen to protect people from misfortunes often associated with witchcraft, where even: ‘For many Christians, witchcraft, rather

than the will of God or the consequences of one's sin, explains why they suffer from illness or other difficulties'.¹¹⁴ In the survey of 2,300 people already referred to, 34 per cent admitted that they feared being bewitched. In the 2005 survey of 780 university students 47 per cent claimed that they believed in witchcraft while 31 per cent feared it. Being a Christian appears to provide a safeguard against witchcraft. In the separate surveys conducted in 2005, already noted, 95 per cent of the 125 respondents agreed that belief in Christ protects against witchcraft while 87 per cent of the 780 respondents did likewise.

Thus, we may ask: how pervasive is tradition in determining the shape and nature of Christianity? Are we dealing with a radically new form of religion or are we not? It is difficult to say but from this discussion it seems that, at least on a conscious level, there is a definite option for Christianity and modernity over against tradition. From the survey of 780 university students in 2005 it was found for instance that only 24 per cent admitted that they believed in ancestral spirits while 22 per cent claimed that they had attended a traditional initiation ceremony. As Colson reflected:

*... Young people have said to me especially this last time (2001) when I was querying them that they didn't think their old religion works ... it doesn't do you any good to appeal to ancestors - it does not do you any good to appease community spirits.*¹¹⁵

Moreover, in the survey of 780 students, as few as 13 per cent agreed that the traditional way of explaining life was better than the Christian way. Yet, as the younger generation opts for modernity and another religious explanation of life, this does not necessarily mean that they fail to appreciate aspects of tradition or ethnicity.¹¹⁶ Similarly, among the older generation:

*... even the educated, including university graduates and professional people, continue to feel a need for explanation and assurance that somehow there lies within human action the ability to ward off illness and misfortune.*¹¹⁷

In Strayer's words, one thus needs to beware of any linear description which posits a steady erosion of traditional systems in Christianity's favour.¹¹⁸ Rather, the indigenization of the Christian faith of Zambians remains ongoing and dialectical.

Conversion: Private and Social

While, as Horton argued, the explanatory aspect of religion remains important for dealing with the ultimate issues of life, this is not to say that the

communion element is insignificant. As Van Binsbergen observed, Christianity provided the kind of social structures that were needed as people from villages moved away to towns or quasi-urban settings where churches usually provided different kinds of community now based more on faith than tradition.¹¹⁹ Writers have argued that people's early faith in Christ lacked what might be called an incarnational aspect where Christ could be seen as rewarding the victims of suffering in the afterlife rather than helping them to take a stand against injustice and death.¹²⁰ While, in colonial times, there was a strong emphasis on personal or private conversion perhaps with little attention to the political and structural implications of Christian conversion, as earlier indicated, this was rarely the full story particularly within the mainline churches. From the outset, they concerned themselves with education, medical care, agriculture, and social services.¹²¹ Thus, what Van Binsbergen asserted in noting the compatibility of Christianity with the emerging institutions of modernity seems partly correct. Churches were not entirely unaware of the complexity of the development process which had a definite modernizing focus about which they had reservations, but their voices were often not heard.¹²²

As early as the 1950s, churches assumed a public stance in favour of justice.¹²³ Although this public word emerged slowly, it was not absent.¹²⁴ After Independence, churches continued to focus attention, somewhat cautiously, on issues of justice even if, as Hastings noted, their political role diminished at a time when in the world Church more forceful theologies of the political were being developed to back a greater explicit church commitment to justice.¹²⁵ In some instances, where church members had come to think of their church almost as apolitical, such commitment proved puzzling and difficult for members of the established churches. How smaller churches and sects proclaimed a message of justice is difficult to assess though their tendency to fail to distinguish sufficiently between personal and social conversion and to support the status quo may be an aspect of this.¹²⁶

The 1990s however proved to be a time when the mainline churches spoke with a clear voice in the political arena even if it was soon somewhat muted by the Christian nation rhetoric associated with the presidency of Chiluba.¹²⁷ Nonetheless it would appear that churches, despite their ambivalent relationship with the dynamics of capitalism, have succeeded in sharing people's battles with whatever forces of oppression are assaulting their dignity.

In both the case of mainline churches as well as other religious groups, it appears that they are seen to be allies of the poor even though in different ways. Christian churches are widely spread throughout the country in both rural and urban settings. The widening gap between rich and poor is reflected when one sees plush new edifices in cities and simple prayer houses away in the bush. There appears to be no clear cleavage of churches towards either poor or rich. In a survey in 2000 of 400 people selected randomly from a high density area in Lusaka, 85 per cent agreed that their church was friendly to the poor who constitute about 80 per cent of the population. Some church groups provide solace through prayer and healing, which assumes even greater significance in the midst of the HIV/AIDS tragedy.¹²⁸ Others act in a similar way but go further by enabling the poor, among other vulnerable groups such as women, to assume responsibility for their plight through some form of what Freire has called education for liberation.¹²⁹

Conclusion

What then is the nature of Christian conversion among Zambians today? Using the Horton-Fisher paradigm, one could hardly deny that Christianity's more adequate explanation of the ultimate issues of life seems to be increasingly important in the choices which Zambians make. Is such explanation essentially traditional or new? Christianity presents a cosmology where a person can expect a life beyond the grave that is more specific than shadows or ancestors. Moreover, despite its mysterious nature, strange doctrines, and alien practices, Christianity includes a worldview where the person of Christ has become progressively less tangential and where the new way of life associated with him appears to gain greater inroads into people's individual consciousness and personal conduct. This includes the shift from the Old to the New Testament idea of God.

Notwithstanding the heavy emphasis on the cognitive element in the religious life that was presented by missionaries, aspects of emotion, fellowship, and social enhancement have not been overlooked in the development of church structures from the earliest times. Almost certainly, western education, with the progressive modernization of society, often intertwined with forms of Christian faith, promotes more acute individualism. However, for most Zambians, being part of the group still remains highly significant.¹³⁰ Thus fidelity to church worship and communal ritual feature strongly in Zambians' religious life as is evidenced in the high attendance at Saturday or Sunday church services. This may be a further

instance of traditional cosmology not only retaining its influence but perhaps serving normatively and helping counterbalance western Christianity's ever closer and unreflective links to the growth of capitalism where, as Bellah puts it, people forget that 'we are mortal creatures who need air to breathe and are dependent from birth to burial on the hands of others'.¹³¹

As Zambians develop a Christian identity, they remain heavily rooted in their traditional religious heritage in line with the more general reflections of Horton and Fisher. Nonetheless, as the Christian gospel has been progressively assimilated, distinctively Christian elements shape the faith. In the Zambian instance, Fisher's view of conversion as personal choice of Christianity and its ongoing indigenization is not merely reformulated tradition as the Horton thesis implies. Conversion is new.

Footnotes

- 1 For the sake of clarity, I shall refer to Zambia throughout, though it was called Northern Rhodesia until 1964.
- 2 In fact, it is said that over 80 per cent claim to be church members. See Bartlett, "Civil Society and Democracy," 435. The country has four main ethnolinguistic groups, namely, Bemba (19 per cent), Tonga (11 per cent), Nsenga (5 per cent), and Lozi (5 per cent) about 45 per cent of whom live in urban settings. It would seem that the Christian population is equitably distributed among such groups.
- 3 Henkel, *Christian Missions in Africa*, 23-39; Weller and Linden, *Mainstream Christianity*, 26- 33, 44-51. In recent times, conversion to Islam is becoming more frequent. See Duma, "Conversion to Islam in Chipata."
- 4 On this see Horton, "African Conversion," 85-108, "On the Rationality of Conversion," Part I, 219-235 and "On the Rationality of Conversion," Part II, 373-399; Fisher, "Conversion Reconsidered," 27—40 and "The Juggernaut's Apologia," 153-173. For an edited version of these articles, see Carmody, "*African Conversion*" or the articles in this volume.
- 5 Vickery, *Black and White in Southern Africa*, 47, 53-112.
- 6 Weller and Linden, *Mainstream Christianity*, 31-32.
- 7 Horton, "African Conversion," 94-95, and *Patterns of Thought*. See also Carmody, *Conversion and Jesuit Schooling*, 55-56.
- 8 Horton, "African Conversion," 94-95. Also: Carmody, *Conversion and Jesuit Schooling*, 55-56.
- 9 Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion, Part I," in Carmody, *African Conversion*, 41. On some problems related to this, see Ifeka-Moller, "White Power," in Carmody, *African Conversion*, 100.
- 10 Horton, *Patterns of Thought*, 332 and "African Traditional Thought," 50-71. See also Kaplan, "The Africanization of Missionary Christianity," 20; Luig, *Conversion as a Social Process*, 265.
- 11 Ranger, "The Local and the Global," 73.
- 12 See also: Horton, "African Conversion," 19-26; Hefner, *Conversion to Christianity*, 3; Horton, "The Rationality of Conversion," Part I, 42; Oliver, *The Missionary Factor*, 208; O'Brien, *The Struggle for Control*, 61.

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- 13 Horton and Peel, "Conversion and Confusion," 484.
- 14 Carmody, "Conversion and School at Chikuni," 195.
- 15 Walls, "African Conversion in the History of Religions," 183-203. This point has also been emphasized by Cox in "The Classification 'Primal Religions'," 55-76.
- 16 Horton, *Patterns of Thought*, 315. See also Kaplan, "The Africanization of Missionary Christianity," 22.
- 17 Colson, "Leza into God," 6. See also Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion," Part I, 44.
- 18 Fisher, "Conversion Reconsidered," 33, 37.
- 19 Carmody, *African Conversion*, 32-33.
- 20 Taylor and Lehman, *Christians of the Copperbelt*, 165-191; Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa*, 15.
- 21 Goody, *The Logic of Writing*, 10.
- 22 Ikenga-Metuh, "The Shattered Microcosm," 17.
- 23 Fisher, "Conversion Reconsidered," 27-39.
- 24 Fisher, "The Juggernaut's Apologia," 63-64.
- 25 Strayer, "Mission History in Africa," 8.
- 26 Taylor and Lehman, *Christians of the Copperbelt*, 191.
- 27 Fisher, "Conversion Reconsidered," 37.
- 28 Strayer, "Mission History in Africa," 1-2.
- 29 Hinfelaar, *History of the Catholic Church*, 80.
- 30 Fisher, "Conversion Reconsidered," 32.
- 31 See Carmody, *Education in Zambia*, 23; Beidelman, "Social Theory," 240.
- 32 Hawkins, "To Pray and Not to Pray," 63; MacGaffey, "African Ideology and Belief," 242, 259. On biblical interpretation, see Engelke, "The Book," 297-306; Comeroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 251.
- 33 Hastings, *The Church in Africa*, 590.
- 34 Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion," Part I, 238.
- 35 Fisher, "Conversion Reconsidered," 33.
- 36 Fisher, "The Juggernaut's Apologia," 71-72; See also Gray, "Christianity and Religious Change in Africa," 82-83.
- 37 Snelson, *Educational Development*, Jacobs, "The Intimate Politics," 564-603.
- 38 See Sanneh, *Translating the Message*; Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 155. On the more local manifestation of this, see Carmody, *Education in Zambia*, 31. See also Berman, *African Reactions*, 213; Macola, "Historical and Ethnographical Publications," 343-364; Mazrui, *The Africans*, 143-146.
- 39 Mulaisho, *The Tongue of the Dumb*, see also Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 98; Hastings, *The Church in Africa*, 590; Carmody, *Education in Zambia*, 30.
- 40 Etherington, "Recent Trends," 217.
- 41 Hinfelaar, *History of the Catholic Church*, 118ff; Carmody, "Conversion and School at Chikuni," 87-89. See also Hastings, *Church and Mission*, 59; MacGaffey, "African Ideology and Belief," 255; Scudder and Colson, *Secondary Education*, 27.

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- 42 Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 63.
- 43 Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 118.
- 44 Carmody, *Conversion and Jesuit Schooling*, 29, 30, 32, 52-55. See also Rotberg, *Christian Missionaries*, 43; Scudder and Colson, *Secondary Education*, 17; Ifeka-Moller, "White Power," 104-105. See also Wellbourn and Ogot, *A Place*, 122; Ogbu, "Investment in Human Capital," 112 and *Minority Education*.
- 45 Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 63. See also Gausset, "Islam or Christianity?" 257-278.
- 46 Carmody, *Conversion and Jesuit Schooling*, 35.
- 47 Berman, *African Reactions*, 206-207. Elias, "The Role of Culture in Moral Education," 49-58. See also Swartz, "Bridging the Study of Culture and Religion," 77; McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*.
- 48 Nzekwu, *Blade Among the Boys*, 87.
- 49 Hastings, *African Catholicism*, 10; Carmody, *Education in Zambia*, 78.
- 51 Fisher, "Conversion Reconsidered," 34-36. See also Barrett, *Schism and Renewal*, xv, 276; Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*.
- 52 Carmody, *The Evolution of Education*, 148-151.
- 53 Carmody, "Conversion to Roman Catholicism," 5-24. See also Carmody, *Education in Zambia*, 78. This point was emphasized by Colson when comparing S.D.A. and Catholic approaches to conversion in Monze area. See Colson, letter to author, dated
- 54 Ranger, "The Local and the Global," 85-88. See also Maxwell, *Bemba Myth and Ritual*; Dillon-Malone, "The Mutumwa Churches," 204-222.
- 55 Chisengalumbwe, "The Repercussions of Colonial Religions in Independent Africa."
- 56 Colson, "Converts and Tradition," 65-75.
- 57 Carmody, "Conversion and School," 193-209.
- 58 Berman, *African Reactions*, 211.
- 59 Carmody, *African Conversion*, 114.
- 60 Carmody, *African Conversion*, 114; see also Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion*, 34.
- 61 On this point, see Miller, "The Christian Missionary," 55-60; Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa*, where he speaks of missions being vehicles of capitalist values.
- 62 Kaplan, "The Africanization of Missionary Christianity," 23-27; Taylor and Lehmann, *Christians of the Copperbelt*, 248.
- 63 Carmody, "Secular and Sacred," 130-148; Strayer, "Mission History in Africa," 1; Rotberg, *Christian Missionaries*, 109; Mazrui, *A Triple Heritage*, 149-150. For a discussion on the issue of identity, see Montgomery, *Introduction to the Sociology of Missions*, 83-89.
- 64 Carmody, *African Conversion*, 115; Johnson, "The Africanization of a Mission Church," 89-107.
- 65 For the role of ritual in this, see Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 113-118; McLaren, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, 82, 183; Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion*, 110, 113, 180.
- 66 For further perspectives on this, see Hiebert, "The Category 'Christian' in the Mission Task," 421-427; Hiebert, "Conversion in Hinduism and Buddhism," 9-22.
- 67 Fisher, "The Juggernaut's Apologia," 72-78.

- 68 Ibid., 77; MacGaffey, "African Ideology and Belief," 252; Horton, *Patterns of Thought*, 354-355; Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion*, 3-5.
- 69 Hawkins, "To Pray and Not to Pray."
- 70 Gray, "Christianity and Religious Change," 80-81.
- 71 Gray, "Christianity and Religious Change," 81-82. For the topic of Satan, see Walls, "African Christianity," 199. On death, see Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 95-96.
- 72 Gray, "Christianity and Religious Change," 81-82.
- 73 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 147-148; Baur, *2000 Years*, 237; Milingo, "African Conversion," 63; Carmody, *Education in Zambia*, 78-79.
- 74 Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 241.
- 75 Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, 148-149.
- 76 Carmody, *Education in Zambia*, 79; Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, 179-186.
- 77 Hinfelaar, *History of the Catholic Church in Zambia*, 165.
- 78 O'Brien, *The Struggle for Control of Education*, 72; Strayer, "Mission History in Africa," 1. See also Cheyeka, "The Distinctive Contribution of the Catholic Church," 20; Carmody, "The Voice of the Catholic Church," 15-16; Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 339-340; Baur, *2000 Years*, 426-427; MacMillan and Shapiro, *Zion in Africa*, 224-258.
- 79 Hastings, *A History of African Christianity*, 22.
- 80 Van Binsbergen, "Religious Change in Zambia," 115. See also Carmody, "Jesuit Mission School," 37-56.
- 81 Colson, "Leza into God," 6. See also Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 262.
- 82 Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 143-159; Horton, "African Conversion," 26; Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion*, 32; Luig, *Conversion*, 254; Montgomery, *Introduction to the Sociology of Missions*, 80.
- 83 Colson, "The Bantu Botatwe," 69; O'Brien, *The Struggle for Control*, 461-462; Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*.
- 84 Cheyeka, "The Distinctive Contribution," 25; see also Ranger, "Conference Summary and Conclusion," 15.
- 85 O'Loughlen, "The Catholic Church Speaks," 11; Komakoma, *The Social Teaching of the Catholic Bishops*, 81-86; Hinfelaar, *History of the Catholic Church in Zambia*, 261-262.
- 86 Ranger, "Conference Summary and Conclusion," 19. See also Hastings, "Reviewing a Relationship," 44.
- 87 Cheyeka, "The Distinctive Contribution of the Catholic Church," 21 ff. See also Lungu, "The Church," 385-410; Gifford, *African Christianity*, 192-197.
- 88 Komakoma, *Social Teaching of the Catholic Bishops*, 224-234; Hinfelaar, *History of the Catholic Church in Zambia*, 394-400.
- 89 Gifford, *African Christianity*, 192-193, 196.
- 90 Phiri, "President Frederick J.T. Chiluba of Zambia," 401-428; Cheyeka, "Concept of Zambia as a Christian Nation," 169-184; Cheyeka, "Church, State and Political Ethics."
- 91 Phiri, "President Frederick Chiluba," 407-410; Gifford, *African Christianity*, 197ff.; Hinfelaar, *History of the Church in Zambia*, 396.
- 92 Carmody, "Catholic Beliefs Attitudes and Practice," 30; Colson, "AIDS and Behavioural Change," 6.

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- 93 Carmody, *The Evolution of Education*, 113ff, Simpson, 'Half London' in Zambia.
- 94 Gifford, "Some Recent Developments in African Christianity," 516 ff.
- 95 See Moloney, "African Christology," 505-515; Angrosino, "The Culture Concept," 824-832.
- 96 Colson, interview by author, Berkeley, California, 7 February 2002. See also Baur, *2000 Years*, 425.
- 97 Carmody, *The Evolution of Education*. See also Bowie, "The Inculturation Debate," 67-98; Isizoh, "The Catholic Church in Dialogue," 37-50.
- 98 Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 14; Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 114-138.
- 99 Montgomery, *Introduction to the Sociology of Missions*, 96; TerHaar, *Spirit of Africa*.
- 100 Ross, "Current Christological Trends in Northern Malawi"; Hillman, *Towards an African Christianity*, 16; Carmody, "The Influence of the Catholic Church on Zambians," 341-361; Carmody, "Catholic Beliefs Attitudes and Practice"; Luig, *Conversion as a Social Process*, 177- 186.
- 101 Colson, "Leza into God," 6.
- 102 Carmody, "Catholic Beliefs Attitudes and Practice," 30.
- 103 Walls, "African Christianity in the History of Religions," 196.
- 104 Georgen, "The Quest for the Christ of Africa," 32. See also "Reflections on Christmas."
- 105 Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, 273.
- 106 Survey of 2004 with 100 Zambians of various denominations, educational backgrounds, and ages... See: Georgen, "The Quest for the Christ of Africa," 27.
- 107 See, for instance, how true this is among the Seventh Day Adventists: Kafima, "How do Seventh Day Adventists... ?"
- 108 Colson, *Religious Life among the Tonga in the Twentieth Century*, 249. This is somewhat like what happened in North America (see Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today*, 66ff).
- 109 Rambo, "Charisma and Conversion," 96-108.
- 110 Colson, *Religious Life among the Tonga in the Twentieth Century*, 257.
- 111 Colson, "AIDS and Behavioural Change," 1-19. See also Hachintu, *The Impact of HIV/AIDS*; Kabani, *How Have Cleansing Rituals Affected the HIV/AIDS Pandemic?*; Milambo, *How Do Tonga Speaking People...?* See also "Reflections on Christmas"; Mazrui, *A Triple Heritage*, 249-252.
- 112 Carmody, "Religious Heritage," 79-90.
- 113 Kelly, "Religion, HIV/AIDS and Religious Education," 174-188; Germond, "Sex in a Globalizing World," 46-68; Simpson, "Sons and Fathers/Boys to Men in the time of AIDS."
- 114 Colson, *Religious Life among the Tonga*, 227. See also Yamba, "Cosmologies in Turmoil," 200- 223; Colson, "The Father as Witch," 333-358; Colson, "The Search for Healing"; Meyer, "Modernity and Enhancement," 199-230.
- 115 Colson, interview by author, Berkeley, California, 7 February 2002.
- 116 Kabwe, "The University of Zambia Students' Perspectives"; Chiyuka, "How UNZA Students Perceive"; Mubanga, "Inculturation in Zambia."
- 117 Cliggett, *Grains from Grass*, 117-118; Colson, *Religious Life among the Tonga*, 139; Ellis, with Ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*, 139-140.
- 118 Strayer, "Mission History in Africa," 5. For how this may happen with regard to witchcraft,

- see Van Binsbergen, "Witchcraft in Modern Africa," 212-263; Mazrui, *A Triple Heritage*, 239-259; Stambach, "African Education, Culture, and Modernity Unwound," 288-295; Mwamba, *Vernacular Christianity and African Theology*.
- 119 For a similar argument elsewhere, see ByungSuh, "The Explosive Growth of the Korean Church Today," and "Religious Deprogramming and Subjective Reality," 197-207.
- 120 Waliggo, "African Christology," 178. See also Ela, *My Faith as an African*, 102-112.
- 121 Garvey, *Bembaland Church*, 180.
- 122 Carmody, "Secular and Sacred," 130-148. For a larger perspective, see Davis, "Competing Views," 115-126; Carmody, "Jesuits and Rural Development," 16-18; see also Montgomery, *Introduction to the Sociology of Missions*, 107.
- 123 Komakoma, *Social Teaching*, 32-74; Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa*, 157; Luig, *Conversion as a Social Process*, 218-222.
- 124 Carmody, "Perspectives on Religion and Nationalism in Zambia."
- 125 Hastings, "The Churches and Democracy," 44; Westerlund, *Questioning*, 198-215. For further examples of where the church failed to move from private to public conversion, see: Van Hoyweghen, "The Disintegration of the Church of Rwanda," 379-381; Baur, *2000 Years*, 352; Ela, *My Faith*, 102-112; Henriot, "Zambia," 31-65.
- 126 Gifford, "Some Recent Developments," 530; Ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*, 108-109; Henriot, "Zambia," 31-65; For a helpful distinction among evangelicals of the different aspects of conversion, see Wallis, *The Call to Conversion*.
- 127 Simuchimba, "Religious Education," 88-97.
- 128 Colson, "AIDS and Behavioural Change," 7.
- 129 Gifford, *Christianity*, 226. On the ambiguity of the relationship between forms of Christianity and women's liberation in Zambia, see Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*; Carmody, "Conversion to Roman Catholicism."
- 130 Magesa, *African Religion*, 242-243.
- 131 Bellah, "Meaning and Modernity," 275; Hamilton, *Sociology of Religion*, 201. See also Van Binsbergen, "Witchcraft in Modern Africa," 212-263; Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, 281; Kaplan, "The Africanization of Missionary Christianity," 21-23.

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AFRICAN CONVERSION: Entering the Fold of Islam

Felix J. Phiri

Introduction

Since the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation on 29th December 1991 by the late President Fredrick Titus Chiluba, Christianity has almost monopolized the entire public religious space to such an extent that the question of how people initially opted for Christianity, rather than sticking to their ancestral religions, seems relegated to a distant past of the country's history. The legacy of Chiluba's declaration resurfaced recently, with more passion than reason, during the constitution drafting process without the slightest consideration of minority non-Christian religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Baha'i and Traditional Religions. The growth in numbers of these religions represents a conflux of religious approaches and individual spiritual quests, making people shift their religious affiliation from one religion to another, back and forth or keeping what is useful in two or more religions at the same time, while portraying themselves as members of one particular religion.

The question discussed in this paper concerns explaining conversion to Islam in Zambia in the light of the Horton-Fisher debate about African religious conversion. Given the time that has elapsed since the Horton-Fisher debate was at its height, more than forty years ago, contemporary studies of religious conversion in Africa have to take into account new factors that have emerged, such as the evolution of the background of traditional religious practices in terms of self-affirmation as well as their relationship with world religions and modernity. Hence, understanding conversion to Islam in the contemporary *Zambian* context should take into account two levels of inquiry: the initial encounters between the first Muslims and the indigenous populations, and modern times where people have entered the fold of Islam having already been exposed to other world religions.

The fact that the majority of the people in Zambia have either taken to Christianity or Islam presents a significant framework within which to test the validity of conversion theories. Rather than discussing the Horton-Fisher theory only, the paper starts with a summary presentation of the historical origins of Islam and the African traditional context. The Horton-Fisher theory is then discussed, to which is added also the 'transaction costs' theory of Jean Ensminger.

Islam: Origin Practices and Beliefs

Islam, one of the major world religions, counts around 1.6 billion adepts across the globe from different racial and cultural backgrounds. The Muslim community (*umma*) of more than fourteen centuries represents a diversity of realities in contemporary African societies. To help better understand how people who were previously non-Muslims have converted to Islam, it is important to overview the basic aspects of Islam.

Islam is the religion of those who profess the faith proclaimed by Muhammad, a seventh century Arab prophet of the Arabian Peninsula. It means ‘submission’ to God whom Muslims call Allah and the proclamation of whose oneness (*tawhid*) is the cornerstone of the Islamic doctrine. As the term Islam has the same origin as the word peace (*salaam*), Islam is widely equated with peace by Muslims (Negosian 2004, p. xv). In line with this, the person who follows or who is an adept of Islam is known as a Muslim – one who submits himself/herself to the will of God. Insofar as Islam is understood as a religion of peace a Muslim is not only a person who submits himself/herself to God but also reflects the peace of God. The fact that there has been a regular pattern of religious violence attributed to some Muslims does not absolve the rest of them of this religious duty. Muslims identify with one another as brothers and sisters in religion, irrespective of origin and race. Thus, the Muslim community is commonly known as the *umma*. This does not mean that Muslims are the same everywhere in doctrine or in practice. Generally, Islam is often associated with Arabs to the point that, on first approach, it is so easy to overlook the fact that the majority of Muslims are not Arabs and are found outside the Arab world.

In c. 610 CE an Arab dweller of Mecca, in present day Saudi Arabia, who often withdrew to the neighbouring mountains to meditate, had an extraordinary spiritual experience which was to mark the beginning of many other similar experiences in which, by the intermediary of the Archangel Gabriel, he received revelations from God (Negosian 2004, p.8). The receiver of these messages was the Prophet Muhammad. The messages were centred on purity of worshipping only one God. This is to be seen against the background of the religious practices of Mecca and the surrounding regions where the inhabitants worshipped many gods. The messages received also addressed issues of immoral behaviour, reminding people of their accountability to God on the Last Day. Those who accepted what Muhammad preached became his companions (*sahaba*) and

contributed to making the new religion known and convinced others to join. The revelations made to Muhammad during his lifetime constituted the Muslim holy book of the Qur'an. 'The Qur'an (also written Koran, meaning 'Recitation') is, for Muslims, the final revelation of God (Allah) and as such contains his divine message to humanity as revealed to his prophet Muhammad' (Negosian 2004, p.65). Examples drawn from his life on matters directly related to religion became the tradition of the Prophet (*Sunna*): 'In other words, the actions, decisions, and practices that Muhammad approved, allowed, or condoned, as well as those he refrained from or disapproved of, are used by Muslims as examples for guidance in all aspects of life' (Negosian 2004, p.80). The two constitute the fundamental sources for the teaching and practice of Islam.

By the time of the death of Muhammad in 632 CE, practically the whole of the Arabian Peninsula had been brought under the influence of Islam. Apart from those who converted through the preaching and the example of the Prophet and his companions, most of the early Muslims converted to Islam through Muslim conquerors. As noted by Levzion and Pouwels (2000, p.2): 'political submission and conversion to Islam were considered one and the same act.' Thus, through a mixture of diplomatic treaties with surrounding sovereignties, coupled with military conquests (*futuhāt*) and voluntary conversions, Islam was able to extend its sphere of influence as far as Spain in the West and to the borders with China in the East within the first hundred years: 'Indeed, the feature which most distinguishes Islam from other religious traditions is that Islam burst forth in the seventh century within the context of an Arab tribal culture and yet in less than a century became the strongest common experience of the peoples of Asia and Africa' (Negosian 2004, p.xvi.).

Basic Tenets of Islam

The basic religious practices of Muslims are summarized in what is known as the *five pillars* of Islam. A Muslim must profess his double act of belief (the *shahada*, also known as the *kalima*), in the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad, saying that *there is no god but God and Muhammad is his prophet*. A Muslim also performs obligatory prayers (*salat*) five times a day, at dawn, at midday, in the afternoon, at sunset and in the evening; he/she must observe fasting (*sawm*) during the month of *Ramadan*, from dawn to sunset and must give alms (*zakat*) to the poor from annual earnings and make a pilgrimage

to Mecca as is prescribed for all the Muslims who have the means to do so.

Besides these acts which a Muslim must perform, there are six articles of faith which include belief in the oneness of God (*tawhid*) – away from the Christian trinity or the divine sonship of Christ; belief in angels (*malaika*) – all the angels that are believed in by Christians and people of other faiths, as well as demons and spirits of all kinds; belief in the revealed books (*kutub*) (Negosian 2004, p.80); belief in the Torah (*tawrah*), the psalms of David (*zabur*), the Gospel (*injl*) and the Qur'an (*al-qur'an*); belief in prophets (*anbiya*) – all the prophets who preceded Muhammad, Christian as well as non-Christian; belief in the Last Day (*yawm al-akhira*) – the end of earthly life, the judgment and the passage into the Hereafter. Finally, there is belief in predestination (*qadar*) – God who is almighty determines beforehand what we do; God who is all-knowing knows our fate beforehand.

In terms of law, Muslims follow specific schools of jurisprudence (*madhhabs*), four for the *Sunni* – the *Hanafi* school dominant in Central Asia and the Middle East, the *Maliki* school dominant in North and West Africa; the *Shafi'i* school found mostly in South East Asia and along the East African coast; the *Hanbali* school which gave rise to the ultra-conservative *Wahhabi* and *Salafi* movements which are based mostly in Saudi Arabia, the other schools being of *Shia* persuasion – the *Ja'fari* school in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, etc., the *Isma'ili* school in Asia, East Africa and Canada, and the *Zaidi* school found in Yemen (Negosian 2004, pp.86ff).

The Muslim Community

During his lifetime, Muhammad succeeded in creating a community of believers based more on piety than on blood relations. In the words of Negosian (2004, p.xvi) 'Thus, the *umma*, by its own Islamic measure, is a privileged community, a community of shared identity and of unity, in which cultural forms, societal patterns, and political realms all coalesce with religious and devotional aspects. Consequently, the principles of Islam dominate and regulate the whole lifestyle of the *umma*.' However, no sooner had Muhammad died in 632 CE than tendencies toward division arose. The succession dispute that ensued left the *umma* divided between the *Sunni* who today count more than 80 per cent of the entire Muslim population and the *Shia* supporters of the succession right of Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. They are found mostly in Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain (Negosian 2004, p. 44).

Many Muslims, besides observing the prescribed tenets of Islam described above, associate themselves with *Sufi* Brotherhoods which propose to their followers a path (*tariqa*) which, through specific techniques of prayer (*dhikr*) and the related spiritual observances, leads them into direct communion with God: 'The purpose of the *Sufi* is to seek union with God through ecstasy. They specify two prerequisites: passing (*fana* ') from the conscious experience of passion and desire to the arrest of conscious thought; and then arriving (*baqa* ') to a conscious state of a continuous union with God.' (Negosian 2004, p.55) Sheiks (spiritual mentors) who have distinguished themselves in guiding individuals and who have an exemplary spiritual life worthy of emulation gave rise to *Sufi* orders which enabled their adepts to progress on the set path. The most prominent *Sufi* orders include the *Qadiriyya*, the *Shadhiliyya*, the *Naqshbandiyya*, the *Suhrawardiyya* and the *Tijaniyya*.

The *Sunni* community is organized on the basis of a universal brotherhood within which different individuals or groups of people exercise different religious functions – caller to prayer (*mu'dhdhin*), prayer leader (*imam*), scholars (*ulama* '), jurists (*fuqaha* '), judges (*qudha* '), without any particular reference to a hierarchy. The *Shia*, on the contrary, reserve important roles for their clerics who are experts in Islamic studies and to whom they accord such titles as *Ayatollahs*, *Mullahs*, *Hujjat al-Islam*, *Da'is*, etc.

Islamic Gateways to Africa

The previous section has described some elements of Islam in view of providing a summary understanding of the religion with which Africans came into contact. Islam made its inroads to Africa through three main ways: conquest, trade and Sufism. The expansionist military campaign started already during the time of Muhammad. In 640 CE, Amr ibn al-As (d. 664), a Muslim military commander, conquered Egypt, thus laying open the way for the conquest of North Africa: 'From Egypt, Islamic influence extended in three directions, through the Red Sea to the eastern coastal areas, up the Nile valley to the Sudan, and across the western desert to the Maghreb. Later, in the eleventh century, Arab nomads drove southward from Egypt to the Sudan and westward across North Africa.' (Levtzion & Pouwels 2000, p.1) The inhabitants of the region to which Muslims came had three choices: to surrender and embrace Islam, to surrender but accept to pay tax (*jizya*) whilst retaining their own religion – hence the survival of the

Coptic community in Egypt to date – or object and perish. Although accounting significantly for the implantation of Islam in North Africa, Islamic conquest lasted but for a limited period. However, its duration was long enough to dislodge Christianity practically forever from the whole of North Africa. Centuries later, the Almoravids of Morocco pushed southwards and conquered the Ghana Empire, paving the way for the Mali Empire of which Mansa Musa (d. 1337) was one of the illustrious leaders. Arab participation in trade along the eastern coast of Africa had long prepared the way for the Islamic penetration of the hinterlands. Similarly, West Africa was to be linked to Muslim North Africa through trade routes that crisscrossed the region, bringing Muslim traders into contact with indigenous populations. Although the traders were not primarily concerned with spreading Islam, they were the first representatives of Islam in the eyes of the local population. Their knowledge of the region and the contacts they established with the local royal courts prepared the way for fellow Muslims who were more concerned with religion. ‘But, because only the King and his immediate entourage came under the influence of Islam, the ruling aristocracy adopted a middle position between Islam and the traditional religion, patronizing both Muslim divines and traditional priests. It was through the chiefly courts that Islamic elements filtered the culture of the common people’ (Levtzion & Pouwels 2000, p.3).

The type of Islam brought by Islamic conquest and Muslim traders was complemented by *Sufi* Islam. The communal organization and most of the practices of the *Sufi* Brotherhoods struck a common chord with African traditional religious. The toleration of indigenous practices enabled the new converts to embrace Islam without being forced to abandon most of their former traditional practices. Later reform movements, however, saw it as their duty to rid Islam of practices they deemed unorthodox.

For a long period, the early Muslim communities founded on the African continent remained localized mostly in North and West Africa, as well as the Horn of Africa and along the eastern coast. Improved communication during the colonial era linked with job opportunities created by the colonial civil service facilitated internal movements within the continent and thus, indirectly, contributed to the spread of Islam inland. Muslims also migrated to Africa mostly from Asia in this period, as was the case for the *Ismailis* of Indian origin in East Africa and Muslims of Indonesian origin in South Africa.

World of Traditional African Religion

To understand religious conversion, a brief presentation of the African world of religions is in order. Having already noted some elements of Islam, it is also important to present the general religious background of those who converted to Islam. Where did they come from? How did they choose to become Muslims? What motivated them? How can we account for their change of religious affiliation?

Today, understanding African conversion to Islam, as noted earlier, has to be considered on two levels, namely, that of conversion within the context of African traditional religions and conversion within the context of modernity. When speaking of the African worldview, it needs to be remembered that there are different African worldviews, given the vastness of the continent and its variety of cultures. However, in this setting we are mainly concerned with Zambia, although, even here, there is risk of oversimplification. Worldviews of discrete traditional societies are often geographically restricted to particular tribes or groups of interrelated tribes. As Lugira (2009, p.38) puts it: 'How the many different African peoples conceive of God usually follows the social structure of a particular locality or culture.' Relationships with divinities are more inward looking, focused mostly on the benefits of local tribal members, without any universalistic pretention. 'Most African oral traditions have pointed to the existence of a power above which there is no other power, a supreme being, Creator, and Originator of the World' (Lugira 2009, p.36). The idea of a supreme being lying above the tribal gods and spirits renders it possible to speak about a form of monotheism, but: 'Often the African concept of monotheism is one of a hierarchy with a supreme being at its head. In this system the supreme being rules over a vast number of divinities who are considered to be the associates of the God' (Lugira 2009, p.36). The supreme being, though apparently distant and withdrawn from the day-to-day life of the people, intervenes on occasion. This happens through the intermediary of lesser gods and spirits: 'The spirit world is made up of superhuman beings, beings that occupy the spiritual universe, between gods and humanity, the space between heaven and Earth. They invisibly tread the Earth so that they are continually present. It is to these lesser gods that people turn in times of joy and sorrow' (Lugira 2009, p.44).

In this world of spirits the venerable ancestors also feature the spirits of the dead who 'are part of the spirit world. Some are ancestors and others are the

spirits of the ordinary dead – that is, the dead of the community who are neither ancestors nor identified as outstanding members of the community. Africans do not worship their dead ancestors; they venerate and respect them’ (Lugira 2009, p.48). Traditional beliefs subscribed to by inhabitants of a particular locality or by members of a particular tribe are attributed to a collective consciousness rather than to a singular founder charismatic figure. They are orally transmitted from one generation to another and are not accompanied by some revealed scriptures such as the Bible for the Christians or the Qur’an for the Muslims. Followers of traditional religions observe rituals for specific needs. The Supreme God is worshipped indirectly through lesser gods through oracles and divinations either for the purpose of appeasement or in view of favours such as health, prosperity, protection from evil, etc. Usually the ritual involves some sacrifice of animals.

Today’s Africa has however evolved from a conglomeration of a multitude of localised traditional societies to complex multicultural societies which also involve non-African civilizations. The degree of survival of African traditional religions varies. A greater part of Africa has now been exposed not only to a culturally wider worldview but also to other world belief systems. ‘African religion is a vital part of the African heritage, and Africans who live on the African continent belong to that heritage. They are culturally connected to African religion. However, not all African people today claim to be adherents of African religion. Many of them are declared Christians, Muslims, or members of other religions’ (Lugira 2000, p.110). It can be said that most of the current traditional religious subjects have in one way or the other either come across non-African religions or are themselves converts to Christianity or Islam.

This neither implies that African traditional religions have been condemned to disappear nor does it mean that those who have converted to world religions have completely abandoned their former religious practices: ‘Since independence many Africans have rediscovered the worth of their religion and have stopped feeling insecure about their religious heritage. Such insecurity was instilled in them by outside religious and colonialist rule that had viewed African religion as being inferior’ (Lugira 2009, p.125). For most of the people, it is not so much a question of choosing one religion rather than the other, but rather of ‘picking and choosing’ from the different religions they come in contact with in response to specific needs within a particular context, leading to syncretic religious practices.

Conversion Explored

One might ask: how is it that Africans who previously were governed by principles based on their own long-standing indigenous beliefs abandoned their ancestral religions and embraced belief systems different from theirs? In an attempt to answer this question theories have been proposed, some of which are discussed here. In appreciation of Peel's findings about *Aladura*, a Yoruba religious movement of Nigeria, in a book published in 1968, Robin Horton came up with a 'thought experiment' of how to explain African conversion in general. He disagrees with Peel's claim that the Yoruba gods and cults are so loosely interconnected that religious change poses no problem: 'Thus he [Peel] says that where existing gods and cults are only loosely co-ordinated with one another, the acceptance of one more god and its accompanying cult is relatively unproblematic' (Horton 1971, p.99). But Horton argued that: '... the multiplicity of Yoruba cults is not the sign of a religious free-for-all. The multiplicity is articulated and as such there is no reason to think it either more or less receptive to new gods and cults than any other traditional pantheon' (Horton 1971, p.99). The presupposition here is that the traditional African belief system would be open to other forms of worship because of pre-existing multiple references to cults and gods.

Horton does not subscribe to the idea that conversion to world religions means adoption of the monotheistic God, say of Christianity or Islam at the expense of local gods. He argues for a gradual identification of the supreme being of the traditional religions with the God of the Christians. He says: 'Hence the African convert has not accepted an addition to the pantheon of lesser spirits. Rather, he has accepted change and development in his concept of the supreme being' (Horton 1971, p.100). He illustrates the point by drawing attention to missionary approaches which often sought to identify in the religious practices of the indigenous people any reference to a supreme god who was then 'purified' and termed as the same God that they had brought, in the manner of 'the unknown god' (cf. Acts 17:23).

To explain how indigenous people arrive at a more refined notion of their supreme being, he proposes an imaginary scenario whereby a traditional society is governed by spiritual beings at two levels – microcosmic and macrocosmic – also described as the pre-modern and the modern, respectively. The first level is the domain of the lesser spirits and the second level that of the supreme being. For as long the people live within the limits of their microcosm, the lesser spirits will be the principle actors in responding to the needs of the people and the

supreme being will only be referred to in rare situations. When society becomes more sophisticated, in the case of modernity, the lesser spirits get overtaken by events and give way more and more to the intervention of the supreme being. Thus, once exposed to a wider worldview, people who previously were content with the potency of lesser spirits will progressively shift their attention and expectations to the supreme being.

Horton's theory provoked much interest. By way of reaction to it, Humphrey J. Fisher proposed his own theory with specific reference to Islam. Basing himself on the historical process that saw the implantation of Islam on the African continent, he identified three key stages in the conversion process: quarantine, mixing and reform (Fisher 1973, p.31). This concurs with what has been noted, the first communities of Muslim traders were not agents of Islam, in the missionary sense of the word. Whatever staging-posts they set up on their trade routes or even their eventual permanent settlements in the heartlands of the African continent, tended to be relatively insulated communities, limiting contact with the indigenous population to business and trade. Under such circumstances, whatever degree of Islamic religiosity was observed, it was somewhat preserved from the influence of local practices. In that sense, it could be termed 'pure Islam,' corresponding to Fisher's quarantine stage.

Following a prolonged Muslim sojourn on the African soil and the interaction with the indigenous populations, some Africans converted to Islam, at times without fully assuming the implications of their action. The early Muslim communities with which they came into contact were themselves not so expressly demanding about the strict practice of Islam for the neophytes. This led to situations where converts retained a good part of the old beliefs and practices, which bordered on religious heterodoxy, *mixing* the new with the old. This stage blended very well with the advent of the *Sufi* brotherhoods. The syncretic practices that were tolerated among the earlier indigenous converts were later to become object of 'purification' by later Islamic movements that deemed themselves guardians of orthodoxy in the line of people like Usman dan Fodio (d. 1817). Their objective was to rid Islam of 'pagan' appendages, mostly borrowed from indigenous religious practices, that had accumulated over the years. Thus, we have a movement in terms of Fisher's reform stage. Jean Ensminger has a further theory entitled 'Transaction Costs' which is based on the general observation that trade played an important role in the spread of Islam in Africa. She suggests that the trade factor deserves a deeper

analysis in trying to explain why some indigenous people in Africa converted. She argues for the significance of benefits derived from trade as a determining incentive for conversion: 'Specifically, the case can be made that Islam provided important economic benefits to individuals through the institutional advantages it afforded in long-distance trade' (Ensminger 1997, pp.4-5). Ensminger further explains: 'I suppose therefore that the economic issues in the African context explain the many cases of conversion or lack of conversion, the timing of conversion, and the tendency for specific groups or class of people within society to convert. Furthermore, it can help explain the preference for Islam over Christianity' (Ensminger 1997, p.5). Ensminger's reflections underwrite much of what Horton argues when he attributes to Islam the shift from the traditional supreme being to one God. Quoting Hiskett's description of conversion among the Hausa, she explains: 'It was easier to trade and to travel as a Muslim than as a polytheist; the Muslim chief was disposed to give greater privileges to Muslims; it was more convenient to wear Islamic dress and to conform to Islamic custom than to remain the odd man out when so many were converting – these and many similar motives must have played their part in setting the trend towards adopting Islam' (Ensminger 1997, p.9). Using economic arguments of transaction costs rendered advantageous in Muslims trading with Muslims, she states: 'The fact that Islam was also a religion and not merely a set of secular institutions further reduced the transaction costs of exchange' (Ensminger 1997, p.9).

After demonstrating her theory through case studies which also show the difference in transaction costs in places where Islam had less influence, Ensminger (1997, p.26) concludes: 'In the case of traders, it would appear to be well documented from numerous cases in Africa that the incentives to convert are considerable. In addition, traders themselves have an incentive to convert their agents and their customers.' In the case of rural Zambia in Lundazi District for instance, distribution of *zakat* by Asian Muslim traders played a non-negligible role in rendering Islam attractive among the local population. The Asians themselves were not indifferent to the sentiment that they were instruments of Allah in drawing new converts into the fold of Islam. It is important to insist however that such transactions are not the sole and absolute incentive for conversion or for practicing charity.

Conversion to Islam in Zambia

In line with what has preceded concerning the basic understanding of the tenets

of Islam, the gateways of Islam into Africa, the world of traditional African religions and theories of African conversion, it could be argued that conversion to Islam in Zambia involves both understanding the conditions surrounding indigenous populations that came into contact with Islam and the channels through which Islam was rendered accessible to the local population. The two elements that have been broadly identified above set the framework within which to view conversion to Islam in Zambia.

Islam comes to Zambia

Islam first came to Zambia through Arab traders and their Swahili partners from the east coast of Africa who made several inroads into the central part of the continent (Phiri 2008, pp.35-69). One of the routes they used to reach present day Democratic Republic of Congo was through the Kazembe kingdom in the Northern part of Zambia. A person called Abdullah bin Suliman established a permanent settlement at Kubuta, on the fringes of Nsama village near Mporokoso. Msiri, a settler of the Kazembe region, ventured southwards by sending an ivory and slave-trading expedition led by Chinfumpa who waged war against Mputu, chief of the Lamba and successor of Chief Nkana. These activities led to the founding of a settlement at Chiwala near Ndola in the nineteenth century. Mohamed Amra estimated the group of indigenous Muslim in Chief Chiwala's area to have been around 500 (Amra 2001, p.24). Today the community has shrunk mostly due to the rural-urban drift. For instance, Sheikh Twaha, son of Chief Chiwala, is now a prominent Islamic scholar in Makeni area in Lusaka.

The Chiwala community is said to have had some link with another settlement established along the Luangwa River, at Kalonga near Mwape in Chinsimbwe in Petauke District, even though J. E. Stephenson gives a more plausible route by which the coastal traders reached Chiwala. He argues that their origin was around Lake Nyasa after which they established passage through Kambwiri's kingdom, east of the Luangwa River, and from there to Lake Bangweulu area. As these coastal traders were Muslim by faith, they introduced Islam into present day Zambia, largely incidentally.

A second way by which Islam found its way into Zambia was through Asian immigrants, particularly the Gujarati Indians. As noted by Fakir Mulla (1988, p.168): 'Islam made a second appearance in the [Tumbuka] region when Indians from the Gujarati province of the sub-continent arrived as traders in Lundazi

and its vicinity in the late 1930s.' Having worked with them in India, the British colonial government enrolled Indians mostly as civil servants. Progressively support mercantile communities developed around British Overseas Management Agency (BOMA) centres. Their numbers steadily increased without becoming too conspicuous because they generally kept to themselves, intermingling with the indigenous population mostly in practical matters only. Public ritual observances were practically nonexistent. It was visiting itinerant Muslim groups such as the *Tablighi Jama'at*, mostly from Pakistan, who eventually rekindled religious fervency within the local Asian communities. Through their multiple trade and business contacts with the local population, they influenced the conversion process not only by persuasive invitations to enter the fold of Islam but at times also through material incentives and employment. Their business and trade skills thus rendered them local agents of Muslims abroad intending to spread Islam.

A third gateway of Islam into Zambia was the African Muslim immigrants, particularly the Yaos from neighbouring Malawi. Other immigrants included West Africans who came to Zambia in the 1980s in search of precious stones. The Yaos had converted to Islam in significant numbers in the eighteenth century and served as middlemen for the inland trade. During the Federation of Northern and Southern Rhodesia together with Malawi, from 1953 to 1963, there was free movement of labour among the three countries. Yao families entered present-day Zambia mostly as farm workers, shop attendants or tailors outside Indian shops. In spite of being minority communities, they firmly preserved their religious identity. Even in the case of marriage between a Yao man and an indigenous woman, children would often be brought up as Muslims.

In reviewing the advent of Islam to Zambia, it could be said that most of the areas that were touched by the first Muslim incursions into Zambia had not yet been exposed to Christianity and so they were practitioners of tradition religions or tribal cults. Their forms of worship and ritual observances were similar to those observed elsewhere in Africa. Where the idea of a supreme being existed, its area of influence was restricted to that particular tribe or to related sub-tribes and its impact was more inward looking than universalistic. Lesser gods and spirits were duly venerated and appeased through animal sacrifices. It needs to be remembered that more than 80 per cent of the tribes in present-day Zambia result from a relatively recent migration. Most of their religious narratives accompanied them as they relocated. Their traditional worldview bears already distant past references

to places of ancestral origins such as Kola and Mwata Yamvwa in Congo. Their contact with coastal traders was mostly by trade which was not only limited to material goods but also to slaves. Their coming was perceived with mixed feelings by the indigenous people who dreaded the possibility of being caught up in the slave trade. To a certain extent, Islam came to be associated with slavery but not to a point where the indigenous people completely developed an aversion to it. Moreover, as already noted, religious conversion in recent times cannot be fully understood without taking into account the context of modernity which involves not only westernization and urbanization but also the accompanying effect of the Christian presence. Indeed, a majority of Zambians have opted for westernization, and Christianity has taken the largest share of the religious space. However, traditional religious practices are still observed: 'Evidence abounds ... that traditional beliefs are still very much a part of the lives of many Zambians. A drive through nearly any shanty compound in Lusaka reveals an abundance of signposts advertising the services of traditional healers. In addition, Zambian newspapers are replete with similar adverts' (Ireland 2012, pp.260-261).

Conversion to Islam in Zambia: An Appraisal

Religious conversion is a complex reality pertaining to human self-understanding and self-expression, underpinned by interactive and evolving factors. Converting to Islam, therefore, should not be isolated from the other related factors surrounding the individual's religious journey from another religion or non-religion to Islam. Converting to Islam in Zambia has similar dynamics as elsewhere in Africa and the theories employed to account for it may correspond to the Zambian context.

Taking up the Horton 'thought-experiment' which uses the paradigm of indigenous progression in the understanding of the local supreme being which eventually gets to be fused with the monotheistic God of world religions, it has been observed that the number of Zambian converts to Islam in a traditional context is on a small scale. Yet, what is true is that repeated contacts with coastal traders in Kazembe or Chiwala area broadened the indigenous people's worldview. Their stories about life at the coast and beyond definitely enchanted the untraveled local dwellers and so did their attachment to this one and exclusive deity. As traders bringing exotic goods into the heartlands of Africa, they were admired but their religion struck the indigenous people as foreign. The same could apply to the Indian Muslims and the Yaos: neither group endeavoured consciously to

actively spread Islam among the local population. Those who converted to Islam through such interactions may have done so for other reasons than the discovery that their lesser gods, who were supposed to control and explain the vicissitudes of their lives, had become impotent in the face of a more complex social change.

However, insofar as there have been indigenous Zambians who converted to Islam over the last decades, Fisher's threefold progressive spread of Islam in a new area describes this well. It does not however explain how Islam eventually incorporated within its fold local converts. The first communities that brought Islam to Zambia kept very much to themselves and only interacted with the indigenous population out of practical necessities. Apart from the Yaos, who were deeply involved with the Zambians through marriages and closer cultural ties, the Asians and the Somalis remained extremely insulated even from the indigenous Muslim converts themselves. One might argue that for the most part these communities are still at the *quarantine* stage of Fisher's theory. Nonetheless, today the modern situation has rendered it possible for the indigenous population to have access to the global discourse of Islam. Through media, Islamic literature, travels and studying in more pronounced Islamic environments abroad, potential indigenous converts have moved beyond the '*quarantine*' stage vis-a-vis Muslim communities. The younger generation of converts are often connected with global Islam through the *madrasas* and even study in prestigious Arab centres of learning like the Azhar in Cairo and other Islamic universities. When they come back they are often put in charge of the *madrasa* programs of local mosques where they teach young Muslims the kind of Islam that is often at odds with what their parents practiced, creating a conflict of generations over religion. In thinking about Fisher's *mixing* stage, one needs to keep in mind the Christian background of most recent converts rather than that of their traditions. We thus find that converts with a Christian background often see themselves and act as members of a 'Muslim church' or the Indian church (*calici la cimwenye*). They seek to express more the congregational aspect of religious affiliation as they knew it in their previous Christian communities. It is also to be noted that there has been some *reform* mostly through foreign itinerant preachers such as the *Tablighi Jama'at* as well as the young graduates of Islamic centres abroad who tend to be very critical of the Islam of their fathers. This has been more noticeable among the Yaos who are mostly Sufi adepts who dismiss the challenges of the young as being of Indian influence (*vacimwenye*).

Fisher's theory thus describes well the stages through which some indigenous people convert to Islam which was once the preserve of foreigners but now incorporates local Zambians. Although at first they only superficially understood the implications of embracing the new faith, they have now moved toward a deeper assimilation. In focusing on this process, Ensminger's theory seems to illuminate the Zambian situation in speaking of transaction costs. With the exception of recent movements such as the *Tablighi Jama'at*, nearly all the groups that served as gateways of Islam into Zambia were linked to trade, not forgetting that the Somalis have also established a strong network in the haulage business. Yet, the traders' impact on the local population has been judged to be limited. Nonetheless, trade with the coast could be rightly termed as revolutionary in its own time whereby the untraveled indigenous people saw their worldview widened in an unprecedented manner. They not only encountered and heard about beliefs and lifestyles of people from distant lands but also some of them most likely became trade companions and travelled around with their coastal partners.

Being a Muslim offered a certain advantage to the Yaos when it came to seeking employment from the Indian mercantile Muslim community and the non-Muslim employees often felt or were made to feel that their religious status constituted an obstacle to agreeable working conditions. Some Indian employers take pride in narrating how many people embraced Islam 'at their hands'. Today, many also are the Zambian business people who have embraced Islam partly because of the contacts they have had with Arab countries. Dubai has become a frequent business destination. Although conversion to Islam is not a prerequisite for the people who frequent Muslim countries for business, some of them spontaneously feel being affiliated to Islam could tip the commercial balance in their favour. Contacts with Muslim countries have also opened up the way for young Zambians, Muslims and non-Muslim alike, to study in Islamic institutions of learning abroad. Some non-Muslims have entered these programmes without fully understanding that it meant studying Islamic sciences. At its height, this movement attracted hundreds of young Zambians and constituted for many others an attractive possibility that brought them into contact with Islam. Following the Islamic practice of alms-giving (*zakat*) and the relatively high economic turnover of Asian businessmen, initiatives have been undertaken to redistribute the resources thus collected among poorer Muslims. As *zakat* is reserved in

principle to Muslims, non-Muslims feel discriminated against and, when they inquire, they are told it is because they are not Muslims. Eventually, some reason that if being labelled a Muslim is all that it takes to qualify for the free handouts, so be it. In comparison with some Christian denominations that insist on their members paying their tithe, some converts to Islam feel that, whereas before they had to 'pay to worship', now they are 'paid to worship', an expression sometimes heard in the rural areas.

The issue of Muslims getting involved in social and charitable work, through which they eventually got some converts, was heavily criticized even by Christian churches which also used such strategies in the past. Although material incentives have undoubtedly occasioned religious conversion in some situations, it is not the full story. In most cases these are but the starting point which eventually leads to conversion through personal conviction. However, evidence suggests that material incentives remain important in many conversions. In a recent (June 2014) conversation with a Catholic parish priest of Lumimba in the Luangwa Valley, he shared how the mercantile Asian community of Lundazi struggles to retain within the Islamic fold the people who come for the distribution of *zakat*, wearing the necessary attire that depicts them as Muslims but are often not in any real sense converts. A former Public Relations Officer of Makeni Islamic Society Trust also confided that the response in the centres that benefitted from initiatives of the once vibrant outreach programmes of the Society is not as forthcoming as before due to diminished material incentives.

Conclusion

In comparison with Christianity which has managed to become the leading world religion by far in Zambia today, Islam has only gained prominence within the past forty years, counting somewhere around 3 per cent of the population. It is contended that most of the conversions to Islam that have taken place of late have done so away from the discourse of the traditional religions. Rather, most of the new converts to Islam already have a well-informed idea about the monotheistic Christian faith. Nonetheless, in the collective conscious of the indigenous Zambians there is an awareness that the monotheistic God of world religions is a 'foreign God.' The choice is less that of an abandonment of ineffective former gods in favour of a new potent one, as argued by Horton, but of the attraction and utility of the new religion, which concurs with the reflections of Ensminger. Even in the

case of ‘accomplished’ converts, useful observances of traditional religions are retained as a firm conviction that they still matter and are necessary, leading to syncretic practices which Fisher identifies as the mixing stage. The leap into the ‘new house’ is rendered neither absolute nor definitive, and so it cannot be said with any sure-footedness that people have converted solely for material gain for conversion is a complex and multifaceted response to social change.

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CONVERSION TO PENTECOSTALISM IN ZAMBIA

By Austin M. Cheyeka

Introduction

Over the last thirty-four years or so, a broad spectrum of people in Zambia have converted to neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic churches. Today there are over 3,000 such churches. Until the late 1980s, these churches had a modest standing among the religious options existing in Zambia. From 1990, a time of a ‘free market of Christianity’ (Luig 1997: 231) to the present, ‘it is fashionable to be Pentecostal’ (Nyendwa 2013: 8). The word ‘Charismatic’ is used for neo-Pentecostals, to distinguish them from the churches of the classical Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God. Notable, however, is that Charismatics in Zambia identify themselves as Pentecostals. When one is asked what denomination one belongs to, the usual response is: *nifwe ba pente* (we are Pentecostal). There are three strands of the Pentecostal churches in Zambia, home-grown (founded by indigenous Zambians), those founded by non-Zambians living in Zambia, and those that are missionary especially from Nigeria and the United States. This chapter is a critical attempt to understand what conversion to Pentecostalism means to Pentecostals in Zambia.

Christianity in Zambia

Christianity was introduced to Zambia by both Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the 1890s. It is an important religion in the lives of the people of Zambia. In the 2010 national census, there were 12,750,000 Christians in the country, 2,750,000 Roman Catholic, 8,870,000 Protestant, 20,000 Orthodox, and 1,110,000 various other Christians. Zambia’s Christianity is spoken about in terms of mother bodies, also known as umbrella bodies: Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ); Episcopal Conference of Zambia (ECZ); Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ); Independent Churches Organisation of Zambia (ICOZ); and African Independent churches, without an official umbrella body. In 1996, Zambia became constitutionally enshrined as a ‘Christian nation’. The focus of this chapter is on Pentecostal churches resulting from the 1960 revival in the US. They affiliate to either EFZ or ICOZ.

The historical landmarks in the development of Pentecostalism in Zambia can briefly be described under headings discussed below.

The Billy Graham's '7-day crusade'

The Pentecostal ferment probably had begun before the Evangelical Evangelist, Billy Graham's '7-day Crusade' in 1960 in Zambia (Cheyeka 2008 & Gordon 2012). This event is epoch-making in the growth of Pentecostalism in Zambia. Although not a Pentecostal himself, Graham gave impetus to the flourish of Pentecostalism.

Scripture Union

In subsequent years, the Scripture Union movement in secondary schools produced Pentecostal big names such as Bishop Joshua Banda of Northmead Assembly of God, Apostle Dan Pule of Dunamis Christian Centre and Dunamis church and Pastor Nevers Mumba of Victory Ministries and Victory Bible church, all products of the Scripture Union group at Hillcrest Technical Secondary School in Livingstone (Cheyeka 2008 & Gordon 2012).

Pastor Reinhard Bonnke

Between 1980 and 1990, Pastor Reinhard Bonnkes's crusades under the aegis of Christ for All Nations (CfAN) visited Zambia (Gifford 1987). Bonnke's rallies or crusades did inspire some young Zambian Christians of different mainline churches who claimed to have been born-again and were active in the Charismatic Renewal Groups or in what had been popularly known as interdenominational fellowships in those days. Many of these young people had also been active in the Scripture Union movement in secondary schools. After the crusades, Bonnke paid for his translator, Nevers Mumba, to attend Bible College at Christ for The Nations Institute in Dallas, Texas (Gordon 2012 & Lockhart 2001).

The Proclamation of Zambia as a Christian Nation

More momentum was given to the growth of Pentecostalism on 29 December 1991 when President Chiluba declared that Zambia was a Christian nation. It did not introduce new substantive laws or establish any church. Politically, it was empty. Freston (2001: 160) describes it as purely symbolic, in tune with much charismatic political theology which talks of benefits accruing mystically from such acts. To date, Pentecostals routinely invoke the declaration as a sort of promissory note for national salvation and, by proxy, prosperity (Haynes 2012b: 129). However, since 1991 hundreds of Pentecostal churches have been formed

because Chiluba's declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation became something of a *kairos* for Pentecostals to blossom.

Methodology

This chapter is based on qualitative research conducted with a sample of ten people in all. Five of these were actual Pentecostals, among whom were three pastors and five were non-Pentecostals who often go to a Pentecostal church. Research questions centred on why people are converting to Pentecostal churches. To understand why people convert to Pentecostalism, the theories of Robin Horton (1971), Humphrey Fisher (1973; 1985) and Bernard Lonergan (1972) have been used. In the interest of clarity let us now turn to these theories of conversion

The Notion of Conversion

The subject of conversion in African contexts is still alive since Robin Horton's article published in 1971 spurred a significant number of articles (e.g., Fisher 1973; Ifeka-Moller 1974; Carmody 1988; and others). Building on the insights of some of the cited work, this chapter extends the debate to Pentecostal Christianity in Africa. One of the claimed characteristics of this Christianity is its emphasis on the importance of a radical conversion, a transformative experience in which a person gives his or her life to Jesus Christ and becomes born-again, which entails that the individual makes 'a complete break with the past' (Meyer 1998).

Robin Horton (1971: 85-108) argues that mass conversion in Africa was as much due to developments in African indigenous cosmologies as it was due to missionary activity. The African 'basic cosmology', he argues, comprises a two-tier system of lesser spirits, active in the microcosmic sphere of everyday village life, and the supreme being, concerned with the wider world – the macrocosm. Horton associated the lesser spirits or lineage spirits with microcosm and supreme being or unique spirit with macrocosm. The lesser spirits take care of immediate human concerns and act as guardians of morality and are frequently approached in ritual. The supreme being is rarely approached and is not guardian of morality. Given this scenario, Horton carried out what he coined as a 'thought-experiment' in which the basic or traditional setting of lesser spirits and the distant supreme being is confronted with the social changes induced by colonialism and modernity, but without the introduction of Christianity and Islam yet. Horton argues that during

rapid social change people opened up to the outside world (the macrocosm) so that the lesser spirits were not frequently approached. Without abandoning them (lesser spirits) completely, people developed their concept of supreme being to meet the needs of life in the macrocosm. Of course, the degree to which the lesser spirits decrease in significance and the supreme being increases in importance will differ for each individual, and will depend largely on the extent to which his/her life continues to be confined by microcosmic boundaries (Horton 1971: 101).

The above thought-experiment of Horton leads him to conclude that the Africans accepted only those parts of Christianity and Islam that coincided with the changes already taking place in the traditional cosmology. They were selective of what they appropriated from Christianity. Thus, Christianity and Islam are reduced to 'catalysts'; they are simply 'stimulators and accelerators of changes (retreating of lesser spirits and appeal to an active, morally concerned supreme being taking over with a new moral code) which were 'in the air' any way' (Horton, 1971: 104). Many academics (Fisher 1973; Carmody 1988; Ifeka-Moller 1974) have criticised Horton's theory because it did not address the various meanings of conversion nor determine the degree of religious change that occurred in Africans (Carmody 2012: 2).

What then is conversion? It may mean different things to different people. Carmody (1988, 1992) spoke of conversion at Chikuni mission in Zambia and employed the definition of Bernard Lonergan, a Canadian Jesuit priest, philosopher, and theologian, regarded by many as one of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century. Going beyond the common understanding of 'conversion' as a person's movement from one religious group to another, Lonergan spoke of it as a major change at different levels of a person's life which he identified in terms of intellectual, moral, and religious. To Lonergan, conversion is a process, almost always occurring in incremental steps. In short, to Lonergan, conversion entails a profound change of horizon leading to personal responsibility not only in religious matters but also morally and intellectually (Carmody 2012: 3).

Lonergan is difficult to follow because of his philosophical enveloping theological arguments, but perhaps he will be easier to grasp if there is an understanding of what he calls 'levels of consciousness in humans', namely: experience, understanding, judgement, decision and love. Against the forms of conversion cited above, intellectual conversion has to do with understanding and

judgement, moral conversion with decision-making and religious conversion with love (Doran 2011: 6-7).

Speaking of conversion by way of reaction to Horton who does not define conversion, Humphrey Fisher (1973; 1985) argues that it takes place in three stages: 'quarantine' (sometimes referred to as 'containment'), 'mixing', and 'reform'. During the quarantine stage, outsiders (Christian missionaries or Muslim clerics) represent the new religion. At this stage, there are no converts, and thus orthodoxy is relatively secure. As the number of converts increase, elements from the old belief system are introduced into the new faith, and thus a period of mixing ensues. Mixing represented the time when the convert was in two separate worlds - the traditional and the new (Carmody 2012). Converts selectively appropriated the practices of the new religion (picking on those that resonated with their own worldview). Finally, 'often after a lapse of centuries' (Fisher 1973: 31), a wave of reform sweeps away the mixing, restoring orthodoxy with a purified version of the new religion usually linked to the acquisition of literacy and, perhaps Islamic Jihads (Carmody 2012:2).

Findings and Analysis

In this section findings are presented and analysed. Rev Nyendwa, a senior Pastor in the Cathedral of Faith church, a branch of the Fire-baptised church denomination in Ndola, explained that for Pentecostals, the word 'conversion' describes the inner work of the Holy Spirit to change a person's heart as in John 3: 6-7 thereby transforming him or her from inside to become a child of God in the Kingdom of God. Genuine conversion is always accompanied with change of character as espoused in Matthew 7: 16-17 (Nyendwa 2014). This seems to be a rather limited definition using scriptures in which the 'change of character' indicates some change of life. It fails to clearly point to personal experience somewhat on the lines of Colson's (2006: 239) observation that: 'Even those who speak out in apostolic and Pentecostal gatherings where public testimonies to conversion and belief are encouraged, rarely give voice to their own personal understanding of religious experience. Testimonies are highly standardised in content and style of utterance'. Somewhat similarly, Van Klinken (2012: 219) describes the testimonies as 'biographical stories' which are largely variations of the typical formula of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christian conversion narratives all over the world: I was living in sin but now I'm saved.

It is clear here that conversion to Pentecostalism is a ritualised event that can happen anywhere as long as one confesses that he or she is a sinner and receives Jesus as his or her Saviour. The clearest sign of conversion is glossolalia (speaking in tongues) - an indication that one has been baptised in the Holy Spirit (Dayton 1987: 15-33). From observation, and as Gerrie Ter Haar (1998: 17) has aptly put it: 'Charismatics, the most recent generation of Pentecostal believers, are equally committed to the belief in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit but do not insist on glossolalia as its positive affirmation.' Rather, conversion in the final analysis is becoming 'born-again', which is often far more about a change in moral lifestyles than a change in religious beliefs (Van Klinken 2012: 220).

Contours of Pentecostalism in Zambia

What follows will essentially discuss salient features of Pentecostalism in Zambia that make it attractive to would-be converts. In interviews, terms used by respondents to describe what attracted them to Pentecostalism were not nuanced. Worth noting, however, is that even a cursory look at the names of Pentecostal churches reveals more than they obfuscate. Each church in its own way addresses a need in the Zambian society. As a result responses to the question of why are there so many of these churches are archetypically, as Apostle Dan Pule (2013) of Dunamis church and Executive Director of Trinity Broadcasting Network in Zambia put it: 'The harvest is plenty but labourers are few. There are so many people not going to churches. The new churches will catch those.' Also reported to account for the growth of Pentecostalism were power struggles in the Pentecostal churches since they were 'owned' by individuals and families. This splintering of churches is expected in the light of the fact that they do not have clear ecclesiology.

Freedom from Sickness and Witchcraft

In catching those who do not go to church, undoubtedly, desire for healing is a strong motivating factor. Brought up as a Catholic and converting to Deeper Life church from Nigeria later in his life, Gerald volunteered his own interpretation of what was going on insofar as healing was concerned: 'Zambians want healing, deliverance, prosperity, and blessings. They want healing from spiritually-generated illnesses such as *ngulu* (spirits that possess humans).' Starting with 'healing' which is related to miracles, signs, and wonders, Nyendwa (2014) argued:

It is undeniable that the casting out of devils and healing the sick has played a major role in attracting people to Pentecostalism. ... We believe whatever happened in the book of Acts can still happen today. People join Pentecostals because they feel their churches are not bothered by their ailments. And you can't stop them because it is the sick who looks for the doctor (Mk. 2: 17). The preaching of God's Word accompanied with signs and wonders is what we call 'The full Gospel' (Acts 20: 27).

Some of the founders of these churches either claim to have been healed of HIV or can, through prayer, cure AIDS. For example, Prophetess Elfridah Mhusambazi, founder of Barak Ministries claims to have been cured of HIV through prayer and fasting. Nyendwa (2014) pointed out:

... Long before the effects of HIV and AIDS in Zambia, Pentecostals had already started preaching the message of positive living. ... Before the end of the message, the hopeless gets the hope just to hear, you shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord! (Ps. 118: 17). A gifted Pentecostal preacher knows how to craft his message that permeates through somebody's personal life in business, marriage, careers, politics, and health.

The meaning of 'hope' in the sermons, according to respondents, was limited to the immediate physical and psychological needs of believers. 'Hope' for the salvation of the soul was muted, a point that Gerald made later. Members of some of these churches say that they find the teachings in their churches 'protective', helping to avoid sexual immorality (Cheyeka 2004: 16). In a study of seventeen Pentecostal men in one particular Pentecostal church in Zambia, Van Klinken (2012: 234) concluded:

Clearly, for them the break with the past advocated by Pentecostal Christianity entails a break with popular forms of masculinity in society that they associate with drinking, sexual aggressiveness, violence, absence from the family, and the oppression of women. Among other things, becoming born again means that they adopt a new understanding of manhood.

One motive for conversion to a Pentecostal church therefore is when its pastor responds to the immediate physical needs of people living with HIV and AIDS because of their conviction that a combination of physical and spiritual support can improve quality of life (Patterson, 2011: 13). In Zambia, Pastor Helmut

Reutter, a German national who came as a Pentecostal Holiness missionary but left Pentecostal Holiness and started his own Pentecostal Gospel Outreach Fellowship (popularly known as GO Centre) in 1992, is a good example of Patterson's argument. Nonetheless, a study by Phiri (2014) disclosed that there were very few people living with AIDS interested in joining Gospel Outreach Fellowship other than coming to utilise the excellent facilities for CD4 count and the acquisition of genuine AIDS drugs from Germany and the US. Thus, motivation for joining Pentecostalism is nuanced.

Freedom of Worship

Freedom of worship refers to self expression during worship in a Pentecostal church. Born in the Emmanuel Apostolic Church of Zimbabwe where her father had migrated to work in the mines, Clenzie congregated with the Reformed Church of Zambia followers during her school days at St. Monica's before converting to Pentecostalism in Lusaka. She said:

When I finished school and moved to Lusaka, I joined Bishop Joshua Banda's church, the Northmead Assembly of God. ... I can pray as loud as I want, I can pray silently and I can pray in my sleep. I express myself to God when I am hurting and when I am happy. These other churches are too legalistic and rigid. They don't give one the space for one-on-one with God. The role of the pastor is to guide me and encourage me.

Other Pentecostals discussing freedom in their churches reported that they were free to worship in their own way. In other churches, they saw monotony and repetition. Cecilia, a Catholic who has frequented Bread of Life Church International said: 'There, at Bread of Life, I can immediately stand and shout "Hallelujah Pastor, Amen", when his sermon has touched my need.' Freedom was also related to blessings, which can only come about when the cycle of curses was broken. Further probing and clarification of what was meant by 'freedom', revealed that it was related to 'deliverance' as well. It is for this reason that one salient feature of Pentecostal Christianity in Zambia is the proliferation of small churches and the near-constant circulation of their members among them (Haynes 2012a: xviii). Respondents explained that if one is not getting spiritual fulfillment where one is, one should move on until he/she finds fulfillment. It can thus be reckoned that Pentecostal churches are different from one another in ways that need to be explored. However, the Pentecostal 'big man', the pastor him/herself,

holds the key to the growth and the attractiveness of the church and it is his/her charisma, socially attributed (Kirsch 2012) that determines membership. Gerald shared the following:

The promises of these churches [Pentecostal] become illusory sometimes and so people change churches like clothes. Some churches have come up with strategies to keep their members. For example, in my own, there is a teaching that if one left, one would automatically be heading for hell. To be honest with you, there are very few Pentecostal churches evangelising for the salvation of the soul.

In analysing participants' responses in the study so as to gain deeper insight into the notion of 'freedom of worship', a member of the Charismatic movement in the Catholic Church, Emely had this to say: 'Okay, sometimes I have gone to a Pentecostal church, but I am a Charismatic within my church. Our priest actually banned our group. So, we did not have the freedom to pray according to the working of the Holy Spirit. Now we have a new priest but he is giving us seminars. So, there is some control.'

Search for New Identity

As well as the search for freedom, some scholars assert that it is often best to see conversion as the search for a new identity, embodied in the membership of an attractive reference group (Simpson 2010). This fits Horton's (1971) description of conversion when boundaries of the microcosm have ceased to confine him or her. For Lonergan it entails new reality – more than sudden change of orientation. Fisher (1985), drawing on Nock (1961), distinguishes between 'conversion' and 'adhesion', the latter often occurring without the former so that identity change is partial. Conversion for Pentecostals, despite the scriptural rhetoric, fails to be holistic and usually focuses on a single dimension.

Search for Jobs, Prosperity and Release from Poverty

Besides the desire for greater freedom for some Pentecostals, founding a church has turned out to be lucrative in the long run. 'So, if I am unemployed, what can stop me from starting a church and let tithe take care of my needs', argued Elizabeth. The Pentecostal Gospel is not the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ in his sermon on the Mountain in Luke 5. Rather it stresses that 'Christianity entails success and that believers have the right to the blessings of health and wealth

won by Christ' (Gifford 2004: 48). Nyendwa (2014) justified his resolve to preach prosperity in these words:

I preach the message of prosperity because it is found in the Bible (3Jn. 1:2). God takes delight in the prosperity of His people (Ps. 35:27). My basic understanding of prosperity is simply "things to be well with you" (3Jn.1:2). I am a believer that though some churches don't preach it, they still live it that is why they go to school, and do business.

'Things must be well with you' as mentioned by Nyendwa can mean an array of things.

All the respondents stated that materialism and individualism had crept into Pentecostalism. Gerald argued for a corrective in the name of revival so that Pentecostalism can be renewed. Jacob attributed the obsession with material things to American preachers and their literature. Nyendwa, nonetheless, defended the Prosperity gospel as follows:

... Our critics and new comers in the Pentecostal 'league' may not know that the early 1970s Pentecostalism was associated with poverty, illiteracy, and backwardness. But in 2013, it is fashionable to be Pentecostal. Critics do not understand the lessons we have learned. ... We preach the word of faith and empower our people with opportunities, ideas, and skills for personal advancement. ... Pentecostals are leading the way to self-realisation and a sense of ownership of the local church by the community. This must be supported. Whatever the criticism, the Pentecostals are coming!

For many analysts, the widespread popularity of the prosperity gospel in the structurally adjusted Global South can be attributed to the increasingly inscrutable inner workings of late capitalism (Haynes 2012b: 124). Central to this interpretation, according to Haynes, has been the Comaroffs's work (1999; 2000), which situates the prosperity gospel alongside witchcraft accusations, rumours of zombies, and of lurid Faustian pacts with the Devil (Haynes 2012b: 124).

Pentecostalism as Pragmatic

In the context of what we have just said it can be argued that Pentecostals display a pragmatic use of Christianity. What stands out from our observations on conversion to Pentecostalism in Zambia somewhat coincides with Allan Anderson's (2005: 46-47) argument that:

Pentecostals proclaim a pragmatic gospel and seek to address practical needs like sickness, poverty, unemployment, loneliness, evil spirits and sorcery. At the same time, these Pentecostals confront old views by declaring what they are convinced is a more powerful protection against sorcery and a more effective healing from sickness that either the existing churches or the traditional rituals had offered.

Notwithstanding the fact that there may be genuine seekers of radical transformation of self our findings suggest that people experiment with Pentecostalism to see if they can become rich if they are poor. After all, the churches' leaders have posh cars, mansions, and money. If they have HIV or had AIDS, it would be useful to try out Pentecostalism just in case a miraculous healing takes place. The same applies to joblessness and infertility. Experimenting leads to changing of churches because if Nevers Mumba of Victory Bible church fails to solve one's problem, one turns to Dan Pule of Dunamis Ministry and its 'Fire Impact' crusades. In the end, conversion to Pentecostalism, as Gerald noted, is a situational commitment in face of pressing personal problems. Not measuring up to Lonergan's definition of conversion as holistic transformation of a person in terms of beliefs, intellect and morality, those who join Pentecostalism, like other Zambians who join non-Pentecostal churches often remain at the mixing stage, that is, living with two world views of Christianity and African traditional religion.

Complete Break with the Past - born-again

To understand living with two world views, one raises the question of whether or not Pentecostalism breaks with the past. The question is: Does Pentecostalism break with the past and by 'past' is not meant the 'immediate past' of one's life and 'sinful' attitudes (Manglos 2010), but break with African worldview as well. To this Gerald answered:

It is impossible to decant ubuntu. But we have a serious problem in Zambia. We copy anything from outside and when we discover that we are wrong, we go back [to tradition?]. We imitate Americans and Nigerians. We have not made Pentecostalism our own. ... It is impossible to separate sheep from the goats. Even for the pastors, it is 'more money in my pocket' that matters. Sometimes I wonder whether there is any difference between a Pentecostal church goer and any non-church goer. We do not

look after one another beyond church gatherings in Pentecostalism and this is clearly evident during time of bereavement and funerals when church members cannot sleep at a funeral house let alone assist in the cooking of food for the mourners. We are just good at wishing one another 'God bless you.'

If Gerald's comment is true, then Pentecostalism does not really touch significant areas of life. The 'more money in my pocket' was also mentioned by another Pentecostal who said that his church was not only registered with the Registrar of Societies but also with the Patents and Companies Registration Agency (PACRA) as a business entity.

There was some ambiguity in some of the responses to the question about breaking with the past. At first Gerald stated that the break is outright, but he was cautious because he made a selection of what to decant in traditional life, such as what he called 'ancestral worship'. He also recounted how, when he got involved in an accident on his way to watch a traditional ceremony, his church members told him that he was paying for his sin of wanting to watch *ifyacisenshi* (pagan practice). Gerald argued for inculturation of Pentecostalism and he reckoned that this was happening in the area of worship with music and dance, something that Psalm 150 talks about according to him.

Pastor Msidi did not think that it was possible to completely break with the past: 'If you were to go to a traditional healer, he would always ask you to bring something before he could attend to you. Unfortunately, this has crept into Pentecostal churches.' As far as Msidi was concerned, if Pentecostal preachers themselves were behaving in the paradigm of the traditional diviner, what would stop their followers from holding onto traditions? In the end, Msidi and Gerald admitted that there was syncretism in Pentecostal churches despite pastors' preaching against unbiblical things (referring to traditional beliefs in witchcraft and ancestors). It is in this light that Carmody's work on conversion at Chikuni disclosed that many converts were syncretists, holding old and new faiths in synthesis and acting from both, in different situations, without much sense of inconsistency (Carmody 1988: 205). Equally, Fisher (1973; 1985) from his research on conversion to Islam in West Africa concluded that African converts largely remain at the mixing stage.

Strangely metaphysical questions of 'why we suffer', 'why we die' and 'what are we on earth for' do not matter a great deal in the Pentecostal process and

when they arise, they are answered with reference to the Bible. People convert to Pentecostalism because of its message that explains their situation. One Pentecostal said that the people founding Pentecostal churches had actually done 'needs assessment'. 'The pastor tells people what they want to hear and they are happy and they stick around; if not, they search'. Gerald argued:

To be honest, and I have made mention of this earlier, there are very few Pentecostal preachers evangelising for salvation of the soul. All the preaching is shifting towards satisfying physical needs mostly, except when preaching at a funeral, then you hear about resurrection of the soul and life beyond death.

This still leaves us with the question as to how transformative Pentecostal conversion is? Gerald's point concurs with what in his seminal work on Chikuni (1988: 205), Carmody found; that many Tonga and other Zambians who went through Chikuni schooling became Catholic largely because of the material incentives offered.

Conclusion

Horton's theory of conversion serves as the primary underpinning of this study. From the findings, conversion to Pentecostalism does not touch people below the surface. Hence, Nyendwa (2013) was probably correct to characterise it as 'fashionable'. What is perceived as conversion to Pentecostalism is largely adhesion. Rather than self-transcendence and psychological transformation, this so-called 'conversion' to Pentecostalism has in the main to do with an individual's immediate physical or material needs. Once 'converted', a person often becomes a church-goer for the sake of more blessings (*amapalo*) such as wealth and health. The outward behaviour is to display *amapalo* more than to radiate the love of God which leads to the service of others. To be precise, this conversion does not entail in Lonergan's (1972) terms, a profound change of horizon leading to personal responsibility not only in religious matters but even morally or intellectually (Carmody 2012: 2-3). Hence, conversion to Pentecostalism in Zambia, in terms of Horton's theory, does not occur because of the explanatory power of Pentecostalism as the basic motivation but more pragmatically along the lines of Carmody (1988: 205) at Chikuni.

The quest for immediate solutions to day-to-day problems like unemployment, poverty, HIV reported here is largely due to the literal interpretation of scripture.

Moreover, there is little social commitment from either members of these churches or their leaders thereby confirming Gifford's (1996:199) assertion that:

Most of these churches normally keep a low profile politically, claim to be completely non-political, interested only in evangelisation or 'taking the continent for Jesus'. This is certainly the most obvious characteristic of African fundamentalism's attitude to government. Yet, paradoxically, this ostensibly non-political concentration on evangelism becomes very political indeed.

The Executive Director of ICOZ, the umbrella church body of some Pentecostal churches, exemplified Gifford's argument in an interview (14 December 2010):

As ICOZ ... We play the role of advisors and we also play the prophetic role. However, we wouldn't join and play the role of Fr Frank Bwalya of the Catholic Church and his red card campaign. We do not engage in protests or contentions. ... The only time we can probably rise against government is when our fundamental human rights of freedom of worship, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly are taken away from us. ... Whether under dictatorship or democracy, power is delegated by God because scripture says authority is established by God.

It should be remembered that ICOZ was constituted with the assistance of President Chiluba in 2001 when he was campaigning for a third term in office which Pentecostal pastors supported because to them, he was God's chosen to rule Zambia. It was formed to counter the formidable anti-third term arguments coming from ZEC, EFZ and CCZ. By way of conclusion we note:

Many scholars of Christianity point to Africa as the place of growth and hope for the renewal of the western church which is dwindling in practicing Christians. But what kind of Christianity will this be? And what implicit knowledge will guide those who will lead it (Simpson, 2003: 400)?

From the discussion, it would appear that the mass appeal that Pentecostalism has had is thus not sustainable as members are for the most part 'shopping around' and return to their classical mainline church in line with Patrick Chabal's and Jean-Pascal Daloz's (1999: 71) observation that few Africans formally abandon their church, they only turn to others perceived capable of addressing their more immediate problems.

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RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN ZAMBIA

By W. Van Binsbergen

Beyond the Intellectualist Theory of African Religious Change

My own growing dissatisfaction with a Hortonian approach to the study of Central African religious change clearly does not converge with Fernandez's. My criticism has to do not with religious images and ideas as such, but with their relation to aspects of social structure. And then I do not mean to contribute to the exchange between Ifeka-Moller and Horton and Peel on social-structural factors in African conversion to the world religions. What I am concerned with here is not the social-structural background which makes individuals adopt or reject a particular form of religious innovation. It is the social-structural requirements for such innovation itself.

The first point I wish to make is that, for a religious innovation to establish itself, it needs not only to satisfy the intellectual requirements such as posed by individual minds reflecting on the changing world order with which they are confronted. In addition, the new ideas and rituals have to surround themselves with new and viable forms of religious organisation. The idea of alien, affliction-causing spirits does not automatically, through some process of logical deduction, lead to the specific non-religious cult organisation characteristic of the new cults of affliction dealing with these spirits. Nor does the High God's rise to greater prominence really imply the creation of churches as organisational bodies, or (in the context of cults of affliction) the creation of centralised, hierarchically organised inter-local cult organisations like Nzila or early Bituma. The Intellectualist theory has little to say on the organisational dimension of religious innovation.

Stimulated by the emerging theory of regional cults, I grappled with this problem. In western Zambia, such cults as Nzila and Bituma were recently founded by prophets; they managed to build up (and partly retain) a very extensive regional hierarchical organisation. These cults I showed as having developed out of a common and widespread substratum of non-prophetic non-regional cults of affliction. Under specific circumstances, which obtained in the case of Bituma, the prophetic cults virtually returned to this non-regional substratum. Under more favourable circumstances however, a cult like Nzila was able to develop into a very large independent church. A comparison between the Nzila and Bituma

cults of affliction, placed against the general context of religious innovation in the area, enabled me to discern some of the organisational dynamics involved in relation to conceptual and ritual changes.

I stressed, as background variables, on the one hand the leadership styles displayed by the prophet-founders, and on the other the specific demographics, economic and ethnic structures of the geographical regions which these cults transformed into cultic regions. Later criticism by Gwyn Prins suggests that for an understanding of the organisational dynamics a more complex model is needed than that of (a) non-regional substratum, (b) regional outgrowth, (c) non-regional decline which I proposed. A closer study particularly of the Nzila side of my comparison may be necessary.

The second social-structural problem in the Hortonian approach has to do with the analytical typology used to characterise the social context within which religious ideas and rituals exist, and within which they change. Neat as Horton's juxtaposition of microcosm/macrocosm may have been, it was a little too simple to be true. This becomes very clear when, in reply to Fisher's incisive (and I must say, rather convincing) criticism of the 1971 version of Horton's theory, the latter in his rejoinder starts juggling with the concept of microcosm so that it encompasses anything between the tiny rural village and the large scale kingdom. Obviously, we would need to define microcosm and macrocosm in a much more rigid way. Only then could we begin to discuss the nature of microcosmic boundaries meaningfully, and their weakening or breakdown. But in addition, we need to re-examine the place of religious ideas and actions within the economic, social and political structure of the units enclosed by these boundaries. Horton's approach gives the impression that a sharp distinction between the religious and the secular (i.e. economics, social, political) is meaningful; thus, as secular structures widen, religious ideas follow suit. Ultimately, the intellectualist approach is yet another, and rather blunt, version of the classic correspondence theory in the social-scientific study of religion. Beliefs and rituals are held to be systematically isomorphic to the social structure, so that, for example, expansion of the latter is reflected in the emergence of more exalted spirits in the former. There is very little room for anything but one-to-one correspondence. A dialectical view, in which, for instance, newly emerging religious ideas might constitute the negation rather than the reflection of a penetrating macrocosm, is nowhere considered in the Hortonian scheme. Yet I am sure that a theory that allows for the religious

negation of macrocosmic encroachment into the microcosm would make much more sense than the straightforward correspondence version, when, we try to apply a Hortonian line of analysis to developments in the popular religion of North Africa or Europe.

What underlies the Hortonian approach is a rather common, but unsatisfactory, theory of social change. Non-religious factors of change are claimed to penetrate from outside through some sort of mechanical process (diffusion?); these factors break down microcosmic boundaries, and the people who thus find themselves exposed to the wider world adapt themselves to the altered social-structural conditions by devising or adopting more universalist religious ideas. It is as if the only way in which economic and political changes could penetrate to the religious plane is through the exclusive medium of the conscious and deliberate reflection of human participants. Horton's stress on causal explanations (lack of enthusiasm for such explanations is what he rebukes the 'devout opposition' for) presupposes a certain compartmentalisation between religion and non-religious aspects of society, as well as one-way traffic between these aspects. When Fisher suggests that it may not have been state formation which led towards more massive adoption of Islam in West Africa, but Islam which led to state formation, Horton has to plod through virtually the entire history of West African jihads to prove him wrong, without being properly convincing, I am afraid.

If religion and secular structure are neatly compartmentalised, and the former is only a secondary reflection of the latter, one does not need a very elaborate theory of social, political and economic change in order to understand religious innovation. All one needs to know is how, and for which section of a given population, microcosmic boundaries started to break down. But this is not good enough. It is more likely that there is a more profound and direct relationship between religious and secular change, and that this relationship is enacted largely (though by no means entirely) irrespective of the conscious reflection of individuals. In order to identify such a relationship over time, one needs a powerful theory of economic, social and political change, and of the ways in which religious and non-religious aspects are intertwined within an evolving social structure. Here we hit on a third shortcoming of the intellectual approach, which again applies to my own version of it. Although there is considerable common-sense plausibility in the idea that lesser spirits administer the microcosm, and greater spirits the macrocosm, one would require a fully-

fledged theory of religious symbolism in order to arrive at a real systematic understanding of this relationship. How does one relate, in a theoretical sense, the geographical or social extension of human spheres of action (in politics, trade, warfare, pilgrimage, agriculture, animal husbandry, residential mobility), to a set of qualitatively very different phenomena: the notions participants have concerning the nature of supernatural beings? How does one relate the shape and texture of intersectional and communication structures to the structure of ideas people involved in these structures have? This is a fundamental problem, for which Horton's work, or my own, does not provide the solution.

Horton's summing up by the simple opposition between microcosm and macrocosm can no longer be maintained. Instead, I submit that the actual units of social structure on which both secular and religious aspects of social change hinge are modes of production. In its purest form, Horton's microcosms could be equated with the domestic mode of production. Far from being internally undivided, it is characterised by processes of expropriation and control between elders and youth, and between men and women. Religious beliefs and practices underpin as well as constitute (and sometimes perhaps negate) these domestic relations. Social and political change in Africa over the past few centuries can be understood as the process through which these domestic communities became articulated to other, more complex modes of production: the tributary mode: mercantile capitalism and industrial capitalism. The breakdown of microcosmic boundaries, in Horton's terms, was nothing but this articulation process. The ascendance of new and more formidable spirits is no longer part of a fluid and gradual process of local microcosms opening up to, and trying to come to terms with, the wider world; nor are these spirits merely the outcome of conscious reflection by participants. Instead, the new spirits are an important aspect, either of the new modes of production articulating themselves to the domestic mode, or of this articulation process itself. As in the case of the domestic mode of production, the new beliefs and new rituals are not just ideological expressions of an underlying, more primary material reality: insofar as they impose new networks for the flow of people and goods (tribute, pilgrims' offerings, healers' fees, etc.) over wider areas, they actually take part in shaping the new, supra-local relations of production themselves.

Let us now look again at the three ideological attractions I claimed the intellectualist approach to have: the idea of essential continuity between colonial

and pre-colonial period; the image of African Man the Active, Religious Innovator; and apparently scientific apologetics for the presence and expansion of two world religions in Africa.

In the modes of production approach, the imposition of colonialism would not in itself constitute a sharp break. Colonialism would be interpreted as a phase in the penetration of capitalism, and particularly as the creation of peripheral, metropole-controlled state structures which, by mediating a new type of class domination in the peripheral economies, allowed for the transition from mercantile to industrial capitalist relations of production. The point, however, is that modes of production are essentially and fundamentally different from each other. There is no gradual continuity between them but only absolute discontinuity. For each mode of production is based on a different central contradiction. Thus the process of articulation, and the attending religious changes, introduce essentially new economic, social and religious forms, which should be discovered underneath the appearance of continuity. The tributary mode of production (organised around kings, chiefs, tribute, often also slaves), the capitalist mode of production (of which colonialism was a secondary instrument), both represented fundamental changes in the relations of production in which local African populations were involved. Far from being a sign of commitment to the interests of the African masses, in terms of freedom, identity or self-esteem, it is a denial of the fundamental class relations in which these masses have been involved for centuries when we ignore this discontinuity in their social and economic history, and indeed their religious history. The actual historical processes by which each mode of production defined itself and articulated itself to pre-existing modes may have been gradual and prolonged; but in these gradual changes real qualitative changes took shape that were central to the whole organisation and ideology of the social formation.

Similarly, the modes-of-production approach would see religious change not exclusively, perhaps not even primarily, as the result of gifted individuals struggling with the interpretation of life, society, and the widening or contracting cosmos. Of course, there is that element too; and it would be foolish not to recognise the achievements of such great religious innovations as, for instance, Central Africa has seen in the course of the twentieth century. But through these individuals, less individual and less conscious processes of profound structural change were at work, processes which the religious innovators and their followers

scarcely perceived or comprehended. However great African prophets have been, a Great Man theory does not really help us to understand them. Neither does a Blind Structure theory, of course, but the latter takes us slightly further, while we are waiting for a symbolic theory to solve it all.

As to the place of Christianity in modern Africa. I cannot say that the modes-of-production approach has really advanced beyond Horton's view. There does seem to be a major correspondence, or at least compatibility, between nineteenth and twentieth century Christianity and capitalism. Once a systematic symbolic theory has been formulated, we shall be able to pinpoint this correspondence convincingly. At the same time there does seem to be considerable room for dialectics here. Mission education prepared many thousands of Africans for a career within capitalist relations of production: how many carpenters, bricklayers, clerks, teachers, nurses, derived their specific skills and their overall adjustment to wage labour within formal bureaucratic organisations, from early mission experience? But the same education also provided thousands of people with the intellectual background and the attitudes to challenge capitalism and colonialism. The success of the world religions in Africa is a firm datum in the study of the religious transformation of Africa; and if Horton's explanation is no longer good enough, the theory advocated here is not yet sufficiently mature to provide a better answer.

However, many problems I discussed above in connection with the Intellectualist approach do come closer to a solution with the modes-of-production approach. No longer do we need to juggle with the concept of a microcosm comprising anything between a small rural village and a large kingdom. The unit carrying a specific, distinct religious complex is not the microcosm or the macrocosm (ultimately a unit of experience), but the mode of production; a unit defined by such primary determinants of experience as labour, production, reproduction, control, and expropriation. The specific pattern, a composite religious system takes at a given point in time and place links up with the specific pattern of mutually articulated modes of production within the social formation, which is altogether more complex and more fundamental than the admixture of macrocosmic and microcosmic elements within a society. Nor is the extreme compartmentalisation between religious and secular aspects of society a necessary assumption for all phases of religious change. Insofar as religious elements are part and parcel of the relations of production (and this is clearly the case in

all modes of production except capitalism), the relation between religious and social change is no longer solely enacted through the individual consciousness of religious innovators and their followers. This relation also takes place at a much deeper structural level, beyond individual reflection. Since religious change is also a matter of shaping new relations of production, the organisational aspect which the Intellectualist approach could not accommodate, becomes much less problematic. Religious change creates not just new structures of thought, dealing with the explanation of causation; it also creates new structures of extraction and circulation, and thus new class-like structures between those involved in the new religious forms in different, complementary roles (e.g. as followers versus leaders).

In Zambia, religious innovation has been a major form of superstructural reconstruction, as a response to the infrastructural changes taking place with the emergence of the tributary and the capitalist modes of production. I claim that the distinct individual forms of religious innovation, of which the overall process of religious change consisted, were so many attempts at superstructural reconstruction. They were first formulated by gifted individuals, and subsequently tried out, adopted or rejected in a wider popular response, among people who were subject to the same processes of infrastructural change as the religious innovators in their midst.

Ultimately, the motor behind superstructural reconstruction is claimed to be an ideological form of class struggle. Local rural communities were confronted with the encroachment of pre-colonial rulers imposing a tributary mode of production; traders (often in alliance with rulers) imposing through long-distance trade, mercantile-capitalist mode of production; and colonial administrators, labour recruiters and capitalist employers in the Central and Southern African sub-metropolises, imposing the industrial-capitalist mode of production. I argue that the forms of religious innovation which emerged in this context (particularly witchcraft eradication, Watchtower and other independent churches, and prophets other than those dealing with affliction) represent an attempt to reconstruct the integrity of the local rural community assaulted by these various incorporation processes.

The penetration of new modes of production attempted to reduce the villagers of northern Zambia to peasants and proletarians. Peasants could then be defined as agricultural producers who, while retaining some control over their means of

production, are involved in a complex social formation within which part of their product is expropriated so as to reproduce a tributary or capitalist mode within the same social formation; proletarians are producers who have no control over their means of production (land, industrial plants, etc.), and therefore have to sell their labour power in a capitalist labour market. I argue that the religious forms of superstructural reconstruction are in essence attempts to resist the process of class formation, by curbing peasantry and proletarianisation, and by reviving, at least at the superstructural level, the rural community as the matrix of a domestic mode of production.

In order to understand the evolution of the Lumpa Church in relation to Zambian nationalism and the Zambian state, I found it necessary to distinguish between a proletarian and a peasant stream of superstructural reconstruction. In the colonial period, the proletarian stream was characteristic of what could be called the 'intensive contract situation', where Africans were directly and painfully exposed to capitalist relations of production including their political and ideological aspects. In this context religious responses like Watchtower and other African independent church movements must be located. The unmistakable element of anti-colonial protest manifest in this stream after the Second World War led to a secular nationalist movement. This movement aimed not at reversing proletarianisation nor at the dissolution of industrial capitalism in the direction of an ideal of viable socialist relations of production. Its proclaimed aim was to seize the state as a possible instrument to improve the conditions of life of African proletarians, with the implication of leaving the overall structure of peripheral capitalism intact. In the peasant stream of super-structural reconstruction, protest against the relatively distant colonial and industrial powers was much less.

(Abridged)

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ENCOUNTER BETWEEN ADVOCATE AND CONVERT

By Lewis Rambo

In every encounter between advocate and potential convert, the real details of their interplay are extraordinarily complex. Encounter might be seen as the vortex of the dynamic force field in which conversion takes place. As a simple linear continuum, the outcome of the encounter can range from total rejection at one end of the spectrum to complete acceptance at the other. Initial reactions to an advocate can change over time; positive reactions can turn negative and vice versa. The advocate also may change over time, altering strategy in response to what is learned through interaction with the potential convert. The potential convert can also be modified and/or adopt new strategies through the interplay.

An interesting finding rarely mentioned in conversion studies is that the majority of target populations reject new religious options. In researching many reports of conversion, I found it striking that a scholar or missionary might enthusiastically report hundreds or even thousands of converts, then in one throwaway sentence note that the percentage of converts was less than 10 per cent. The truth is that enmeshment with old systems of religion, family, society, and politics seldom encourages movement to a new religious option. Personal and social conditions rarely facilitate change. Hence, what makes any voluntary conversion process possible is a complex confluence of the “right” potential convert coming into contact, under proper circumstances at the proper time, with the “right” advocate and religious option. Trajectories of potential converts and available advocates do not often meet in such a way that the conversion process can germinate, take root, and flourish.

Even the relatively more successful Latter-Day Saints report that only one in one thousand contacts eventually becomes a Mormon. Similarly, a leader in the discipling movement of the Churches of Christ conceded to me that fewer than one in one hundred responds to invitations to Bible talk sessions, the preliminary step in that church’s attempt at building relationships that lead to conversion. Galanter reports that his research indicates only one person in one hundred responds to invitations to Unification Church dinners, while even fewer attend workshops and fewer still become members. Indeed, seeking proselytes is extremely difficult and discouraging work. Evangelistic organisations continually have to build enthusiasm among members to preserve the momentum required to convert a relatively few others.

To date, no one theoretical system has, to my knowledge, been able to choreograph all the salient features and forces operative in the critical encounter stage. But let us briefly survey some interpretations provided by the social sciences.

Isichei's View of Encounter

Elizabeth Isichei, a historian, examines the response of the Igbo people in Nigeria to Christianity. She restates an admonition we have also stressed: "Igbo responses to mission teaching were conditioned by a whole variety of factors: age, sex, status in the community and the nuances of the individual personality among them, and ... no analysis can even begin to mirror this variety and complexity". Isichei's assumptions are familiar: "The history of ideas does not occur in a vacuum, and any analysis is misleading if it excludes at least a mention of the historical determinants of conversions. It is a truism that most movements of conversion were determined by social factors. This was true of the Igbo, and it [is] necessary to see the encounter of ideas against the background of the actual social processes which ultimately determined the success; if success it can be called - of the missionary enterprise.

Isichei focuses on responses of the Onitsha people, a subgroup of the Igbo. The initial reaction was welcome. As an isolated people they were delighted to have allies and new avenues of trade. Their curiosity about foreigners made them warm and open. As time went on, however, only the marginalised of Igbo society actually converted. Isichei states: "As in other missionary contexts, the missionaries drew their converts mainly from the rejects of Igbo society, those like slaves, or accused witches, who had no prospect of happiness in Igbo society and therefore nothing to lose by attaching themselves to another one". As mainstream people began to see the divisive and revolutionary potential of the new religion, they began to persecute both the missionaries and those who chose to convert. She further explains: "The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were, for the Igbo, an age of anxiety, a time of dislocating economic and social change, of disturbing confrontation with an alien culture, followed by the prolonged experience of violent conquest. Very few men considered becoming Christians who were happily integrated in their own society unless they felt that society to be threatened. This is a commonplace of mission history, and it is equally true of the Igbo".

Isichei found the patterns of interplay between advocate and convert to be extremely complex. The welcome first offered by the indigenous people

shifted, upon further interaction, into suspicion and resistance. Those who did convert were generally the outsiders, “rejects” of tribal society. Their mode of conversion involved a syncretism that mixed old and new in a fashion that was determined by their own values, assumptions, and rituals. Paradoxically, after years of missionary education efforts, there was a secularising effect introduced by Western ideas and values overall. Because of the erosion of indigenous power and prestige, the traditional religion lost its plausibility for many people. Often only an elderly minority sought to preserve traditional religious myths, rituals, and symbols. Rather than being a dynamic system that responded to realities of communal and environmental life, the traditional religion was frequently preserved in a rigid fashion in order to salvage some remnants of it. Tribal tradition became generally denigrated by youth educated in mission schools.

Isichei, with no little pain for the pathos of the situation, asserts: ‘The encounter takes place, not in debates between Igbo and missionaries, but in the minds of individual Igbo. Since the missionaries did not accept the reality of the Igbo spiritual world, it was inevitable that only the Igbo, consciously or unconsciously, could construct the dialogue. We have seen it lead to three main paths; those of the syncretist, the secular man, and the disillusioned traditionalist. Each gropes with a sense of dislocation, a sense of loss. To select the metaphor this time from Igbo literature: *Onya na-a apa ya ada ana*. A wound heals, and a scar remains.’

Resistance to the Advocate

Norman Etherington provides an extensive case study of the importance of the sociocultural context with regard to resistance and rejection of a new religious option. Responding to the work of Beidelman, he explores the relative importance of missionary motives and strategies versus the indigenous context of potential converts in south-eastern Africa. By 1880, nine different Christian missionary societies were active in areas of Natal, Pondoland, and Zululand: Methodists, Roman Catholics, Congregationalists, Lutherans, Anglicans, and Presbyterians from France, Germany, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States.

Careful analysis of differences among these groups (in terms of missionary personnel, goals, and strategies) brought Etherington to the conclusion that, at least in this particular area, these variations could not account for differential response rates among the indigenous Africans. Indeed, Etherington argues that

the forces against the missionaries were so strong that all developed a similar strategy: the missionary station. The missionaries found that the best (perhaps only) way to establish a church was to create an option for those few who did convert to live separately from their communities of origin. The missionary compound with its schools, churches, hospitals, and stores provided converts with an insulated life secure from the wider world they had known. Resistance of local people to the new religion was so strong that the missionaries felt they had no choice but to create these compounds.

For example, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions sent six missionaries to South Africa in 1835. Their strategy was to convert entire groups of Zulus, develop them into independent Christian communities, and then send Zulus as missionaries to the rest of Africa. These American missionaries went so far as to oppose the activities of colonial authorities and sought to improve the status of black Africans. Nevertheless, they met persistent and powerful resistance from the vast majority of Zulus. After years of frustrated efforts, the missionaries ultimately supported the use of imperial force to break the power and authority of tribal leaders and aid in establishing missionary stations where converts could survive.

Macrosocial Relations

Robert L. Montgomery proposes that the spread of religions is influenced by the relationship between the advocate's society of origin and the potential convert's social context. Montgomery asserts that religion provides important resources for the creation, consolidation, and support of a society's identity. Acceptance of a new religious option is possible when there is a perceived threat to the receptive society, and when that threat arises from a source other than the origin of the new religious option. A new religious option is rejected when there is either no perceived threat or the threat arises from the same sources as the new religion. There are situations in which segments of a particular society are under threat from the dominant group. In some such cases the threatened subgroup may adopt a new religious option that may challenge the dominant group.

The subgroup may use the new option as a potent weapon in its conflict with the dominant group. Montgomery illustrates his theoretical model through the Christianisation of Korea. Christianity became a very important force in Korea during the Japanese occupation between 1910 and 1945. Because Japan

presented such an overwhelming threat to the identity of the Korean people, Koreans welcomed the Christian message advocated by the European and American missionaries. Likewise, Islam thrived most in regions where the Arab armies were able to liberate people from the oppression of such groups as the Byzantine and Persian empires.

In addition to acceptance and rejection of new religions, mixing occurs. In certain situations in which the foreign was mandated, the indigenous peoples fiercely maintained their distinctive identities and modified the new religion to preserve the values and the identity of the receptive society. Such mixing is evident in many colonial nations where Christianity was foisted on the conquered peoples.

Context as a Catalyst for Conversion

Understanding a potential convert's reaction to a new option has been a topic of extensive discussion and debate among scholars. Robin Horton's Intellectualist Theory is an important contribution, developed to account for the differential response to Christian and Islamic missionaries in sub-Saharan Africa. Horton assumes that human cognition is affected by a group's economic, political, socio-cultural, and geographical circumstances, and he endorses the view that converts are creatively active in their responses, not passive. In fact, he sees Islam and Christianity as merely catalytic forces behind developments in the indigenous religious systems of thought that were operative prior to the introduction of Islam and Christianity.

Horton explains the different responses to Christianity and Islam in Africa as the result of the context each tradition encountered. The heart of the Intellectualist Theory is that African cosmology consists of two tiers, or levels: the microcosm and the macrocosm. The microcosm consists of cults, rituals, and beliefs endemic to the local communities and tribal groups. This microcosm is populated with spirits and forces that are understood to be in control of the world of the local setting. The macrocosm, on the other hand, encompasses the wide world or environment, with a supreme being as the over-arching power and origin of the lesser spirits.

The balance of emphasis between the supreme being and the lesser spirits is determined by the degree to which the community is focused on microcosm or macrocosm. An isolated or stationary group having few contacts with the wider world devotes most of its energy to local spirits. A group that communicates,

travels, and/or trades with differing peoples and societies is likely to have more interest in the cult of the supreme being. Horton believes that religion and the social matrix are so intertwined that a change in the socio-cultural setting will stimulate a change in the religious sphere.

Indigenous groups are constantly adapting their religious ideology in response to changing religious, social, political, and economic factors; people are active and creative in making these changes, even without the introduction or imposition of outside forces. Thus, Horton asserts that initial responses to Christianity and Islam were based on the relative emphasis of the group and/or individuals on microcosm and macrocosm, on cults of the lesser spirits and the cult of the supreme being. Groups that focus primarily on the microcosm are unresponsive; groups emerging into the macrocosm are especially responsive to Christianity or Islam, because these religions provide extensive rituals and beliefs relevant to the larger world. The degree of elaboration and responsiveness to outside elements is determined by the active adaptation of the people themselves.

The Religious Factor in Context

Horton's theory of conversion, first articulated in 1971, has stimulated extensive debate. The earliest critique came from Humphrey J. Fisher, who centred his criticism on the fact that Horton was chiefly concerned with Christian conversion and had only slight interest in conversion to Islam in Africa. Fisher also believes that Horton downplays the role of "pure" Islam and Christianity in the lives of Africans. He rejects Horton's rather simple scheme of explanation of differential response. The major point of Fisher's critique is that Horton fails to recognise the distinctively religious dimension of Christianity and Islam.

Fisher offers a three-fold scheme of the development of Islam in Africa and articulates the difference of conversion in each phase. The three phases are quarantine, mixing, and reform. In the quarantine phase, which can last hundreds of years, Muslim traders, merchants, and religious teachers or ritualists move into an area but are more or less isolated from the wider society. The relatively small numbers who do convert are often slaves, because they are detached from their traditional society and are thus more available for new religious options. During the quarantine period, converts are numerically few because one must break with traditional society in order to become a Muslim, and the price of such a break is high. Mixing begins when there is a breakdown of barriers to

conversion. Fisher notes that conversion during the mixing phase is often more like the “adhesion” described by A.D. Nock than conversion; adhesion requires a less radical break with the past. It is not uncommon in Africa for a person to be involved in multiple cults and to engage in various ritual activities. Becoming a Muslim is fairly easy in such contexts. Indeed, Islam allows relative ease of admission, unlike Christianity, which generally requires a long period of training. The admission ritual is simply to state the confession: “There is one God and Mohammad is God’s prophet”.

A reform phase often emerges in the form of jihad (or holy war) movements, which demand exclusive loyalty to Islam and the doctrinal and behavioural purity of “high” Islam. During this phase, syncretist elements of traditional indigenous cultures are vigorously denounced and purged. Fisher believes that a major factor initiating the reform phase is literacy. As more Muslims become trained in the Koran and other Muslim texts, they discover discrepancies between Islam in a mixed environment and the pure Islam of the past. One might say that a second, intensified conversion takes place. The initial adhesion to Islam is replaced with a vigorous, pure Islamic conversion that demands movement from indifferent acceptance to deep commitment and purity. Fisher observes: “The reformed Islam which was imposed alike upon the newly converted, the reconverted and the recalcitrant was based upon the literary monuments of the Muslim heritage. It involved, sometimes, a sharp and even cruel insistence upon proper standards, and an equally sharp break with local traditions”.

Diffusion of Innovation

Richard W. Bulliet proposes the use of the “diffusion of innovation” theory for interpreting the nature of conversion. This concept was developed initially in the biological sciences, and later employed in sociology to explain how new technology was adopted in various parts of the world. Through extensive use of biographical dictionaries extant in Muslim cultures, Bulliet carefully examines evidence of name changes, considered to be a significant indicator of conversion, and their relationship to the pace and sequence of conversion in Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and Spain. He empirically establishes that conversion to Islam took place in a way that is consistent with the diffusion of innovation theory.

The theory supposes that a population’s adoption of a new concept generally takes place in accordance with the standard distribution curve, which can be

visualised in the familiar statistical bell S-curve or the S-curve for the summation of standard distribution. The bell or S-curve is divided into intervals known as standard deviations. Statistical percentages predict the probability of adoption. Diffusion of innovation theory proposes that the first to embrace a new option are “innovators” who comprise about 2.5 per cent of the population. The next group are the “early adopters,” who make up some 13.5 per cent of the population. The third group are the “early majority”, 34 per cent of the total.

The Tate majority” are the fourth group, also 34 per cent of the total. Fifth, and last, are the most reluctant or resistant 16 per cent of the population, the “laggards”.

Diffusion of innovation theory is based on an assumption that adoption of something new is based on access to information. As increasing numbers of people adopt the novelty, there is a bandwagon effect, characterised by more and more interest in and less and less resistance to the innovation. Bulliet stresses a potential significance of this approach to conversion: “What is useful about this division into categories is that it suggests that people who converted at different times had very different motives and experiences”.

Using the diffusion of innovation theory, Bulliet constructed a hypothetical timetable for the conversion process to Islam, a process that took place over four centuries. For his detailed study of conversion to Islam in Iran, he reports that the innovators were those 2.5 per cent who converted to Islam before 695 CE. These innovator converts were slaves, prisoners of war, and others of very low social status. As non-Arabs, they were required to become mawali (that is, fictive members of Arab tribes), but they were considered inferior to real Arabs and were discriminated against and stigmatised. Few converts adopted Muslim names in this period. Between 695 and 762, the early adopters comprised an additional 13.5 per cent of all the eventual converts. Stigmatisation gradually diminished but was still practiced by the community that the convert rejected in order to become a Muslim. The early adopters began using biblical names, considered by Bulliet to be safe vis-a-vis the Christian and Jewish communities. Bulliet adds that “the early adopters were largely people who were able to change residence upon conversion. Within this group could be found artisans, merchants, and religious and state functionaries; but what is most important is the general exclusion from the group of rural landowners”.

Between 762 and 820, the early majority began to emerge and comprised

34 per cent of the total number of converts. Bulliet reports: "With the removal or lessening of bars to conversion, such as ostracism or persecution by non-Muslims, the primary factor in the determination of the conversion process during this period was probably the dissemination of information. Increasingly, Islam was regarded as a permanent and irreversible aspect of Iranian life, and the idea spread that adherence to Islam was an absolute good in a manner analogous to the absolute advantage of a superior technological process or device". Between 772 and 869, more than 60 per cent of the conversions took place. The bandwagon effect is clearly evident during the early majority and late majority phases. The late majority (again, 34 per cent of the total) were converted between 820 and 875. The laggards, the last 16 per cent, were converted between 875 and 1009. As more and more people in Iran converted to Islam, there was a remarkable increase in the use of five distinctively Muslim names: Muhammad, Ahmad, Ali, al-Hasan, and al-Husain. With the bandwagon effect converts could publicly identify their new allegiance through their names and suffer no negative consequences.

Differential Motivation and Experiences

Several important issues emerge from Bulliet's work. First, he suggests that conversion processes are different at different times in history. Some scholars of conversion continue to conceptualise it as a static phenomenon that is universal and invariant, and some theologians argue for one particular mandatory model. Bulliet has shown that conversion is a dynamic process that varies according to place and time. The type of people converted, the nature of their experience, and I would add the consequences of their conversions, are different at different times and in different places. Second, he demonstrates that conversion is a cumulative process. In other words, the conversion of large numbers of people generates momentum and expands the process over time.

Missionary Adaptations

What change does the personal and dynamic encounter effect upon the advocate? Such interaction has consequences not only for the potential converts, those who convert and those who resist, but for the advocates as well. The missionary wants to be effective, and therefore assesses the situation and modifies strategies and tactics in order to be more successful in particular settings. Some missionaries change in ways that are more profound than mere methodology would warrant.

Steven Kaplan nominates six types of missionary change: tolerance, translation, assimilation, Christianisation, acculturation, and incorporation. Even though his study focuses on missionaries in Africa, these types may be considered relevant around the world.

Tolerance

Tolerance is often an expedient and/or a functional necessity for the advocate. Confronted with beliefs and practices that he or she finds more or less repugnant, the missionary must face the reality of these beliefs and practices and hope that tolerance of them will permit the persuasion process eventually to change such objectionable behaviours and attitudes.

Translation

To communicate the new religious message in a manner that is understandable, the missionary engages in translation. Kaplan means more than merely translation from one language to another. He points to the creativity of missionaries in finding comparisons and analogies with indigenous culture and customs that will familiarise the message, clothe the new story in recognisable garb.

Assimilation

Some missionaries, especially after they have developed more in-depth knowledge and experience of a particular setting, engage in assimilation. Kaplan notes that missionaries will sometimes utilise the traditions and rituals of an indigenous culture in the practice of Christianity (as, for example, in burial rituals). For some modern missionaries, the incorporation of local practices is a major step forward, though their predecessors, especially during the nineteenth century, were initially repelled by the customs they encountered. After learning the language and developing relationships with the local people, however, some found that the indigenous way of life actually had many positive aspects, and assimilation of indigenous forms into worship became more and more common.

Christianisation

Christianisation is another strategy used by missionaries. Particular indigenous rites and practices are “cleansed” of any “unChristian” elements and transformed so that they become officially “Christian”. Thus, the missionaries move from

mere respect for the indigenous culture to a more affirmative stance. This was the pattern with European pagan customs, and is much the same when African practices are “sacralised” or legitimized into the Christian way of life. The form of a ritual, otherwise African, may be pagan in origin, but the content is securely Christian.

Acculturation

The strategy of acculturation owes most to reduction of cultural arrogance and intolerance. Preservation, or in some cases restoration, of traditional elements of tribal life is recognised to have inherent human value. The advocate’s ethnocentrism and cultural blindness are transformed, or at least significantly mitigated, so that the missionary becomes an important agent in the conservation and promotion of indigenous cultures. Some missionaries may “go native”, jettisoning their own Western culture and fully embracing the way of life of the people they are serving.

Incorporation

To Kaplan, the ultimate change is for the missionary to be so impressed by indigenous concepts that he or she introduces these into normative Christianity. Incorporation of such world-views, values, and rituals is sometimes so complete that the advocate develops a view of Christianity very different from the one originally brought into the missionary setting. Two representatives of this process are John V. Taylor and Vincent J. Donovan. Taylor, an Anglican priest, reports in his superb book *The Primal Vision* that his experience in Uganda transformed his view of Christianity. Donovan’s *Christianity Rediscovered* narrates his confrontation with Masai life and thought and their effects on his understanding of Christianity and the missionary enterprise.

Potential Converts and Convert Adaptations

The constellation of events that may transpire between the two poles of rejection and acceptance is ferociously complex. Keshari N. Sahay provides us with a useful set of categories for describing and interpreting the contours of encounter over a long period of time. Sahay conducted extensive research on the conversion process of the Uraon tribal people in Chotanagpur, India. Lutheran missionaries arrived in the area in the 1840s, but conversions were few until the

arrival of Constant Lievens, a Roman Catholic. Lievens's success, according to Sahay, was attributable to his service as a legal advocate of the impoverished and oppressed people. Sahay contributes to our discussion of five varieties of how the encounter took shape for the Uraons who became converts: cultural oscillation, scrutinisation, combination, indigenisation, and retroversion.

Oscillation

In the early stages of encounter, incipient converts fluctuated between traditional beliefs and their new commitment to Christianity. Their affiliation was nominal and, for most of them, their knowledge of Christianity was extremely limited. For some, the motivation for conversion was to receive material benefits, especially legal assistance against oppressive landlords. However much they wanted to be Christians, the new converts remained deeply attached to their Sama traditions. In times of trouble they returned to the old ways of healing. Sahay reports that 83 per cent of Roman Catholic converts and 93 per cent of Lutheran converts still acknowledged belief in witchcraft and sorcery.

Scrutinisation

As time went by, the Uraon converts, because of their new beliefs, eliminated more and more elements of their traditions that were considered incompatible with Christianity. As their knowledge grew, they became more aware of conflict between belief systems, and in order to establish their new identity as Christians, they often made public gestures that would distinguish them from non-believers. For example, the chundi (the topknot of hair) was cut off. Christian converts also rejected the use of tattoos, except for a small cross on the forehead. Some "secular" traditions were retained, but specifically "religious" elements of their old traditions were eliminated. Many people experimented with the new beliefs and tested the efficacy of traditional rituals.

Combination

Another strategy mixed various elements of Christianity with local Uraon traditions. An important element of tribal culture was dancing, but some European and American missionaries worried that dancing stimulated inappropriate sexual activity. After a period of conflict over the issue, both sides became willing to compromise, and the missionaries accepted dancing as an integral part of the culture.

Indigenisation

Christian (or, more accurately, Western in some cases) traditions were incorporated into the local way of doing things. For instance, when a disapproved of ritual or activity was eliminated from the traditional culture, people sought an equivalent practice among the missionaries and then made it part of their own lives. Hence, fusion and replacement took place.

Retroversion

After a generation or two of Christianisation, the people sometimes re-evaluated elements of their culture that had been suppressed and decided that it was legitimate to re-adopt certain practices. For instance, vermilion, a crucial element in traditional weddings and festivals, had been eliminated by the Uraons. In later times, converts decided it was compatible with Christian principles to use the precious stone once again. Sahay concludes that when Christian identity was consolidated among the Uraons and they were more mature in their faith, they were more affirmative toward non-conflicting traditions that they had previously rejected.

Sahay's model is another useful way to see the process of how the advocate and the potential convert respond to one another, and to understand better the nature of that encounter over time.

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Religious Conversion: an African Perspective includes a selection of key texts which are not easily accessible elsewhere. Most of the chapters discuss the long-standing thesis of Robin Horton who argued that religious change results from social transformation. The contributors provide different perspectives on what remains an ongoing provocative, though inconclusive debate. The book has chapters on conversion in Africa from such authorities as Robin Horton, Humphrey Fisher, and Richard Gray. It also contains chapters on Zambia by Elizabeth Colson, Brendan Carmody, Austin Cheyeka, Felix Phiri and W Van Binsbergen.

This collection of chapters provides an introduction to the discussion surrounding the query: Did the Christian and Muslim messages bring something fundamentally new to the African religious horizon? What has indigenization meant? What is the role of traditional religion?

Religious Conversion: An African Perspective is intended primarily as a resource for university and college level courses on the anthropology and history of religion in Africa. It should also be of interest to the general reader.

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“ By introducing a course on Conversion at the University of Zambia and through his teaching, writing and seminars, Professor Brendan Carmody has exercised a wide influence on students and teachers in Zambia. This book is a must buy for students in different universities and colleges offering religious studies.”

Professor Austin Cheyeka, University of Zambia.

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